

STRANGE BARE FACTS

A war trilogy

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Grey Lady

Cast

Cady Hood or, Achilles Grey

Sgt. Ralph Lewis

Chaplain/Doctor/Hayward

Chorus of women (more than 4, less than 10, racially diverse and capable of playing many different characters: soldiers, widows, prostitutes, slaves, Regimental officers, etc.)

Setting

Nantucket, Washington, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Boston.

1862-63

Act One

i.

Brant Point Beach, Nantucket. Wind howls, sea sprays. It's November 1862. A gray mist covers the stage.

A woman, Cady, stands looking out at the sea, she is attractive, but not particularly feminine-looking. She holds her right hand above her eyes, as if it shields her from the mist.

The sound of a steamer coming into port. As if she's seen something, Cady falls to the ground. She looks up and sees a boat with a white flag half-mast.

She picks herself up, steps forward.

A letter falls from the sky with a light thud. She looks at it. She does not pick it up.

A man enters, wearing the outfit of a Union chaplain.

CHAPLAIN

Dear Mrs. Hood,

I regret to inform you that your husband Ezra James Hood perished as a result of wounds that he sustained on the battlefield in Maryland. His last words were of God and salvation. He fought with honor. He died well. I enclose the bullet that dealt the fatal blow.

My deepest apologies,

Arnold Rickenbocker, Chaplain

The chaplain exits.

Cady looks at the letter. She picks it up and opens it. She turns over the envelope and the bullet falls out. She does not read the letter.

She picks up the bullet. She holds it close to her.

She screams.

A group of women in Civil War-era mourning clothes (big skirts, all black) enter.

CHORUS

Thou art in the self-same plight as I; thy lamentations for thyself remind me of my own sad case.¹

Cady looks at them. She scoffs.

They reach out to her. She turns away from them.

¹ Euripides, *Trojan Women*

They take prayer books out of their sleeves. They read.

CHORUS

The soldier should endeavor
to be a Christian
in the armies of his country,
as well as in the
peaceful avocations of life.

He should be obedient to his commanders,
firm and courageous in battle,
upright in his conduct,
faithful to every duty,
ambitious to excel,
avoiding intemperance,
profaneness
and vice,
and everything injurious to his health and morals,
resigned under misfortune,
patient under suffering,
and willing
to die
for his country.²

The women open their prayer books, turn away from the audience and kneel.

The image of the women kneeling with their prayer books open resembles a cemetery. They pray to themselves quietly. Their lips are moving, and we can faintly hear their breath—but we cannot hear what they are saying.

Cady turns to the audience.

CADY

I did not know that love was
what it is
until it was no longer there.

I did not know anything.

I chose Ezra from a small pool. From a small pool on a small island. And love in a small pool on a small island has advantages.

Small pool love is quiet. It is neat. It is even. It is temperate. It is what it is.

What I do not want is this.

² Soldier's prayer

She gestures to the chorus of women.

CADY

I do not want to wear black for three years.

She begins to undress.

CADY

I do not want to live on an island of melancholy. With the backward glances, with the apologies, the whisperings and the pity.

She steps out of her dress. She wears woolen long underwear.

CADY

I want newness and excitement and something else.

She puts the bullet in a small pocket in her long underwear.

A foghorn sounds.

Lights shift.

ii.

The sound of a match striking.

In the darkness we see a man lighting a piece of paper on fire. He holds the paper until it burns his fingers and he drops it to the ground.

Lights up.

Cady, in men's clothing, stands in front of an old doctor.

He takes a wooden stethoscope out of his pocket. He checks her heart.

DOCTOR

Breathe.

She takes a shallow breath.

DOCTOR

Deeper.

She takes a deeper breath.

DOCTOR

Good.

The doctor looks at a sheet of paper.

DOCTOR

Achilles. You are fit for service.

CADY

Thank you, sir.

A moment passes.

DOCTOR

Funny.

CADY

What, sir?

DOCTOR

Achilles.

CADY

Yes.

DOCTOR

Like the warrior.

CADY

Yes, sir.

DOCTOR

Well, may God bless you.

CADY

Thank you, sir.

The doctor looks at Cady carefully.

DOCTOR

Don't worry about the whiskers.

CADY

Sir?

DOCTOR

War will give you whiskers. Sure enough. Next time you're in Boston? You'll have a full beard.

CADY

May God grant it.

DOCTOR

Indeed. Indeed.

The doctor looks at Cady again.

DOCTOR

That's all, soldier.

CADY

Aye. Good day.

Cady exits the doctor's office. Her posture changes. She exhales loudly.

CADY

To be a man one must be noble. Brave in the face of cowardice. Certain in the face of uncertainty.

Loyal. Considerate.

Not womanly. Not kind. Not meek. Not small.

I arrived in Boston the day before Thanksgiving. I told Mrs. Macy that I was visiting my father's cousin in Dorchester for the holiday. She's been kind to me, Mrs. Macy, but only because she feels sorry for me. Her son George has been at war since the beginning and she's sorry for my loss, but glad for herself. She gave me a basket with cornbread and canned beans for the journey. I shared them with the others on the steamer because I didn't want to bring them with me to the recruitment office.

I brought a change of Ezra's clothes with me and little else. His clothes still smell like him. First I put them on so that I could feel safe again. So that I could feel his scent around me. Eight months since his last furlough and they still smell like him. What kind of magic is that?

I looked in the glass and I saw a man. I saw a man who wouldn't have to wear mourning clothes. Who wouldn't have to stay on Nantucket sewing and shivering and crying. I saw a man who could travel to the battlefields. Who could make himself useful. Who could continue the battle that Ezra lost.

Cady picks up the pile of her clothes on the floor.

I chose the name Achilles because Ezra would have liked it. But also because I like it. Instead of Mrs. Cady Hood, I am Achilles Cady Grey, Private in the 20th Massachusetts. I will travel to Camp Cameron the day after tomorrow, where I will learn to be a soldier. After that I will probably die for my country.

What else would I do? Live?

Living seems much harder than dying, now.

The Battle Hymn of the Republic begins to play. Cady salutes, dropping the dress on the floor.

A battalion comes onstage and collects her. The stage is empty, except for the dress.

Lights change.

iii.

Camp Cameron, Cambridge. Cady sits with Ralph, another soldier, he is tall and blond and kind of hot in a waspy/Scotch-Irish way. Ralph's eyes are closed.

Cady eats an apple. Ralph opens his eyes and looks at her. She chews slowly, looking back at him.

CADY

Do you want some of my apple?

RALPH

No thank you.

CADY

Is it too loud?

RALPH

It's an apple. It's bound to be loud.

CADY

It is.

RALPH

You just enlist?

CADY

Two weeks ago.

RALPH

After the news from Antietam?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Bloodiest day—

CADY

--I lost my... brother.

RALPH

Vengeance.

CADY

Something like it.

RALPH

You ever been to the South before?

CADY

Never been outside Massachusetts before.

RALPH

Large country to spend your whole life in one state.

CADY

One island.

RALPH

An island?

CADY

Born and raised on Nantucket.

RALPH

You a whaler?

CADY

No.

RALPH

I thought all Nantucket men were whalers.

CADY

Not anymore.

RALPH

What do you do now?

CADY

Farm. Fish. The women make baskets.

RALPH

Whaling sounds more fun.

CADY

My father was a whaler.

RALPH

Nantucket. There're a couple of other young men from Nantucket in the Regiment. You must know some of them.

CADY

I suppose I must. Not a very large place.

RALPH

No.

CADY

What about you?

RALPH

What about me?

CADY

Where are you from?

RALPH

Brookline.

CADY

You have a family back there?

RALPH

My wife, Edith.

CADY

No children?

RALPH

Not yet.

Ralph looks at Cady.

RALPH

You look too young to be married.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Maybe after the war. You'll return a hero.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Women flock to heroes. Like pigs to slop.

CADY

Slop?

RALPH

Are there pigs on Nantucket?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Then you know.

CADY

I don't suppose I understand.

RALPH

Youth and inexperience. You'll learn.

Cady takes another bite of her apple. Chews thoughtfully.

CADY

How did you woo your wife?

RALPH

Quite admirably. She was the most beautiful woman in Boston. She had many suitors. Somehow I managed to fight them all off. I made her believe that I was the only man who truly loved her.

CADY

And were you?

RALPH

I was not. But I was the most adamant about it. Others may have loved her more.

CADY

Do you miss her?

RALPH

Of course.

CADY

When we go into battle, will you think of her?

RALPH

I will. You don't have a wife, do you have a sweetheart?

CADY

I did. For a time.

RALPH

What was her name?

She thinks.

CADY

Cady.

RALPH

That's a pretty name. Was she very pretty?

CADY

She wasn't particularly exceptional.

RALPH

But you loved her?

CADY

I did.

RALPH

Beauty isn't everything, I suppose.

CADY

No.

RALPH

But it doesn't hurt. What happened to her?

CADY

She married someone else. They moved to New Bedford.

RALPH

I'm sorry.

CADY

I don't think about it anymore.

A moment.

CADY

When will we travel to Washington?

RALPH

When we are ordered to.

CADY

Will it be soon?

RALPH

Yes. Most likely.

CADY

Good.

Cady finishes her apple. She throws it away.

CADY

The pigs on Nantucket like apples.

RALPH

Too good for slop?

CADY

I suppose they are.

RALPH

I didn't get your name.

CADY

Achilles Grey.

RALPH

Achilles.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Quite a name for a farmer from Nantucket.

CADY (*correcting him*)

Fisherman.

RALPH

I like it.

CADY

Thank you. My parents were... poetic.

RALPH

Yes. I'm Ralph Lewis. My parents were not poetic.

CADY

It's a pleasure to meet you.

RALPH

I'm going to try for some more shut-eye. Before we head out. You should do the same.

CADY

I'm not tired.

RALPH

Maybe not, but you will be.

Ralph closes his eyes.

Cady fidgets. She tries to look masculine. She doesn't know what to do.

CADY (*sings, not too loudly*)

I'm a raw recruit with a bran[d] new suit,
One hundred dollars bounty,
I'm going down to Washington,
To fight for Nantucket County.³

³ Song from the period

Ralph opens his eyes.

RALPH

Keep it down, Achilles.

CADY

Sorry.

RALPH

If you're going to sing, move along.

CADY

I'll keep quiet.

RALPH

Thank you.

Silence.

Then, a whistle, a shout. Ralph opens his eyes.

CADY

Time to go?

Cady stands.

RALPH

You seem overly prepared to meet your maker.

CADY

Perhaps.

Ralph stands.

RALPH

Grab your pack.

Cady picks up her pack. It's heavy, but she can handle it.

RALPH

It was nice to meet you.

CADY

I thought we could march together.

RALPH

Oh.

CADY

I'm a very good conversationalist.

RALPH

I can see that.

CADY

I'm very well-read. We could discuss literature. Or politics.

RALPH

Why would we do that?

CADY

What is it that men usually talk about when they march?

RALPH

Women.

CADY

Oh.

RALPH

Or God.

Depends on the soldier.

CADY

Which do you prefer?

RALPH

Women. But I'm afraid that you won't have much to talk about.

CADY

Why not?

RALPH

You're a very nice, kind young man—

CADY

Thank you.

RALPH

-- and I don't want to perplex you.

CADY

By talking about women?

RALPH

When we get to Washington, I will bring you to Miss Melissa's house. Then we can talk about women.

CADY

I assure you, I know plenty about women.

Ralph looks at Cady closely, intensely. A new side of Ralph.

RALPH

Do you know the way they smell after you've fucked them? The way their hair feels under the palm of your hand? The flash in their eyes when pleasure meets pain?

Cady blushes. She does know these things, sort of. But she has a feeling she'd have a better idea if she let Ralph show her a thing or two.

She takes a moment.

CADY

It is true. I have had a sweetheart or two, but I have not known these exact pleasures.

RALPH

Then I will certainly take you to Miss Melissa's house when we arrive in Washington.

CADY

Will I experience all these things at Miss Melissa's house?

RALPH

Not the first time.

CADY

No. *(she laughs nervously)* Of course not.

Ralph starts to exit. Cady stares after him.

RALPH

Achilles? Step lively.

CADY

Yes, Ralph. So, how many times have you been to Miss Melissa's house?

RALPH

I could never be unfaithful to my Edith.

CADY

Oh.

RALPH

But one hears things.

They exit. A train whistle.

iv.

Chorus enters, dressed like Washington area prostitutes. They look bored.

CHORUS *(singing throughout the scene)*

As I lay with my head in your lap, camerado

*The confession I made I resume-- what I said to you in the open air I resume:
I know I am restless, and make others so;
I know my words are weapons, full of danger, full of death;
(indeed I am myself the real soldier;
it is not he, there, with his bayonet, and not the red striped artillery man;)
for I confront peace, security, and all the settled laws, to unsettle them;
I am more resolute because all have denied me, than I ever could have
been at all accepted me;
I heed not, and have never heeded, either experience, cautions,
majorities, nor ridicule;
And the threat of what is called hell is little or nothing to me;
and the lure of what is called Heaven is little or nothing to me;
...dear Camerado! I confess I have urged you onward with me, and still
urge you, without the least idea what is our destination,
or whether we shall be victorious, or utterly quelled and defeated.⁴*

Cady and Ralph enter. Cady looks at the women, she smiles and then looks over at Ralph who is flirting with one of them already.

A woman approaches Cady, whispers in her ear and takes her hand. She leads her offstage, Cady looks back at Ralph who shoos her on.

Ralph remains behind. He flirts, but he doesn't touch. The women continue to sing.

After a few moments, from offstage we hear a woman shriek and gasp. To Ralph this sounds good. Even to the other prostitutes maybe it sounds good.

Another soldier enters, takes a woman offstage. The women continue to sing.

Cady and the woman emerge. Cady smiles, a forced smile, at Ralph. The woman returns to the group. She smiles conspiratorially towards Cady.

Ralph approaches Cady and slaps her on the back.

RALPH
Well?

CADY
Illuminating.

RALPH
Good.

CADY
She was very nice.

RALPH
Nice.

⁴ Walt Whitman, Drum-Taps

CADY

Understanding.

RALPH

They've seen all kinds. A virgin isn't going to shock her.

CADY

No.

RALPH

It's early still. We have time for an ale or two before we have to be back at the barracks. Unless you're too exhausted.

CADY

Oh no. An ale sounds good.

RALPH

Grand.

Ralph exits before Cady does. The women swirl offstage, still singing. Cady looks at them, enthralled and a little disgusted.

Lights change.

v.

Cady squats next to a tree, she pees.

CADY

It is wrong to want to be with a man so soon after my husband has died?

My Ezra, whom I loved in a small pool love way.

Whom I cared for deeply.

With whom I could talk for hours about literature or the rights of man
(how Ezra loved to talk about the rights of man).

Who would keep me warm on cold nights
and sleep alone on the porch on hot nights.

But who did not...

I did not want to mourn Ezra in the way I was expected to.

I wanted adventure.

I wanted bravery.

I wanted to become a man.

But, oh, this is different from what I expected.

Cady stands, she pulls her pants up, buttons them.

CADY

I must remember myself.

The sound of muskets firing.

Ralph enters. Sees Cady.

RALPH
Achilles.

CADY
Hello.

RALPH
What are you doing out here?

CADY
Relieving myself.

RALPH
So modest.

CADY
I find sometimes that I cannot go. With an audience.

RALPH
You are quite a curiosity.

CADY
What are *you* doing out here?

RALPH
Looking for stragglers. We fall in soon.

CADY
Oh!

RALPH
Come along.

Ralph exits. Cady looks at the audience, then follows him out.

vi.
The Battle of Fredericksburg.

Fog fills the stage. Half of the chorus is dressed like Union soldiers, the other half Confederate soldiers. The Union soldiers cross the river in boats, arrive in town and get mowed down by Confederates hiding in houses.

Screams, shouts, a bloody chicken is thrown across the stage. The sound of cannon fire.

The stage clears of fog.

Union soldiers, officers and enlisted men loot the city. They run by with piles of books, clothing, food. It is mayhem. At one moment a man, Henry Ropes, stops. He looks at the audience.

ROPES (*overeducated Boston accent*)

Books were carried out by the armful,
read a few minutes,
and thrown down.
You would see splendid copies of Byron or Milton or Scott,
kicking about in the mud.⁵

Another, Henry Abbott, stops, looks at the audience.

ABBOTT (*same accent but a little harsher*)

I went into nearly every house to get some nice little silver thing for mamma,
but it was too late.

I got nothing better than a commonplace edition of Byron for you,
but a very good edition of Plutarch's Lives for father.⁶

Ropes and Abbott run off with their books.

We hear a loud banging version of "Yankee Doodle" on a piano. The soldiers sing along.

CHORUS

Yankee Doodle went to town
Riding on a pony
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it Macaroni

Etc.

The lyrics trail off as the men become drunk, forgetful.

The music transitions into the original version of "Carry me Back to Ole Virginny."

Slowly the soldiers leave the stage until there is one woman singing the last verse alone, slowly, painfully.

CHORUS LEADER

When I am dead and gone to roost,
Lay de old tambo by my side,
Let de possum and coon to my funeral go,
For they are my only pride;
Den in soft repose, I'll take my sleep,
An' I'll dream for ever more,
Dat you're carrying me back to ole Virginny,
to ole Virginny shore.

⁵ Henry Ropes, letter to John Ropes

⁶ Henry Abbott, *Fallen Leaves*

Sounds of cannon fire. Muskets. Shouts. Screams. Moans.

A bright flash of light then darkness.

vii.

Lacy House field hospital outside of Fredericksburg. Soldiers lay on stretchers, moaning in pain.

Nathan Hayward enters, Regimental surgeon of the 20th Massachusetts.

He's covered in blood, and holding a saw.

Cady enters.

CADY

Excuse me, doctor! I was sent here by Lieutenant Abbott?

Hayward looks up.

HAYWARD

Why?

CADY

I just arrived from Washington. He didn't know what else to do with me.

HAYWARD

Hell of a day to show up.

CADY

It appears that way.

HAYWARD

What's your name?

CADY

Grey.

HAYWARD

The men over on that side are dying. If they're already dead, try to identify them—letters, photos, what have you.

If they aren't dead yet? Ask them their name. But don't tell them why. Be nice about it. You seem nice.

CADY

Yes sir, thank you sir.

HAYWARD

Where're you from?

CADY
Nantucket.

HAYWARD
Oh, we've got a number of you boys here. Keep an eye out.

CADY
Will do.

Cady walks down to the end of the soldiers.

The first one she sees is dead. She unbuttons his coat, rifles through the pockets and sees a letter, she goes to make a note of the name, but she doesn't have the means to do so.

She goes back to Hayward.

CADY
Excuse me, do you have paper and ink?

HAYWARD
Somewhere. There's a desk in the other room. Check in there.

CADY
Thank you.

Cady exits. Hayward, meanwhile, walks over to one of the soldiers.

HAYWARD
Can you feel your hand?

PATIENT
No sir.

HAYWARD
Good. Close your eyes.

He begins to saw the man's hand off. Cady comes back in and sees this. She stops herself. She can't stop looking.

HAYWARD
Get to work, Grey.

CADY
Yes, sir.

Cady goes back over to the first soldier. She records the name that she sees on the letter.

Hayward and Cady work in silence like this for a few moments.

So far, everyone Cady sees is dead.

Cady gets to the fourth soldier and can sense breath, life. She leans in close.

CADY

Excuse me, sir. What's your name?

GEORGE

George Snow.

CADY

George??

GEORGE

Do I know you?

CADY

I'm—

GEORGE

Cady?

CADY

George.

GEORGE

Why are you here?

CADY

I joined up. After Ezra died. I couldn't stay there. I just couldn't.

GEORGE

But you're a—.

CADY

I know.

GEORGE

You'll be a good soldier.

CADY

Thank you.

GEORGE

Ezra missed you. He talked about you a great deal.

CADY

I missed him. I miss him.

GEORGE

Be good, Cady.

CADY

I will.

GEORGE

Take my body back to my mother.

CADY

You'll be fine.

GEORGE

No. I won't.

Hayward looks over at Cady.

HAYWARD

You find one of the Nantucket boys there, Grey?

CADY

I did.

HAYWARD

How is he?

CADY

Good.

HAYWARD

You got his name?

CADY

Yes.

HAYWARD

Good. Can you help me wrap up this man's arm?

CADY

Oh, yes?

HAYWARD

I've lost my nurse. I'm sure he's doing something important, but—

Cady rushes over.

CADY

What can I do?

He hands the man's arm to Cady.

HAYWARD

Hold this, while I (*He throw the hand into a pile of limbs*) do this... Ok. Just stay there like that. Thank you.

He wraps up the man's wrist.

HAYWARD

You hear what happened out there?

CADY

No.

HAYWARD

Three days ago, we cross the river into Fredericksburg and the Rebs are sitting pretty in the houses and just cut down everyone in sight.

Lots of good young men.

Terrible day for the Regiment.

Then yesterday? We take the town but it's more of the same. Brutal. Leander Alley? You know him. He's a Nantucket man.

CADY

I do.

HAYWARD

Shot through the eye.

Four of his men, your men, Nantucketers, carried him back here.

Died immediately. That's the way to go. If you're going to go.

I've seen everything. Typhoid fever, infection, diarrhea that won't go away.

And those guys are still alive, but mercy—

just shoot me dead.

CADY

Yes sir.

Hayward has finished wrapping the stump.

HAYWARD

You can come back anytime. If you want to get away from the action a little bit, I could use you.

CADY

Thank you.

HAYWARD

Now get back to those men. Names, families. Whatever you can get. And then find the chaplain and he'll take care of the rest.

Cady goes to the body next to George. Dead. She unbuttons the coat, searches everywhere for some kind of identification. She finds none. She begins to cry.

Hayward looks over at her and then turns back.

George puts his hand on her hand.

GEORGE

Don't cry Cady.

She turns to George, puts her hand over his and kisses his brow.

CADY

You're a good man, George.

GEORGE

So are you.

He drops her hand. We hear a death rattle. Cady looks at him and closes his eyes. She wipes her eyes.

She stands.

CADY

This one is dead, sir.

HAYWARD

Shot clean through the lung, nothing to be done but wait for the breath to leave him. It's good that you were here to give him comfort.

Now. There's a whole other pack outside, half of them probably frozen to death. Check them over. Find the chaplain.

CADY

Yes sir.

Cady begins to exit.

HAYWARD

Death is natural, Grey. Try to remember that.

CADY

Is war?

HAYWARD

I believe it is.

Cady exits. Hayward takes a quick nip out of a flask, puts it back in his apron.

The bodies of the dead soldiers rise, slowly beginning to stand. They fall into formation. They march offstage.

Hayward wheels off the amputee.

viii.

Night-time near the camp. Ralph leans against a tree, his eyes are closed.

Cady enters, she is a little shell-shocked, there's some blood on her face. She clears her throat. Ralph opens his eyes.

RALPH

You look like hell opened up and swallowed you in.

CADY

Abbott sent me to the field hospital.

RALPH

You still want to meet your maker?

CADY

If I do, I want it to be quick.

RALPH

No last words?

CADY

I have no use for last words. I don't have anyone.

RALPH

You have friends.

CADY

I don't.

RALPH

What about me? I'm your friend, aren't I?

CADY

Yes. I suppose you are. But my last thoughts aren't going to be about you.

RALPH

No? Why not?

CADY

One's last thoughts should be lofty, I think.

RALPH

I'm too base for your last thoughts.

CADY *(laughs)*

Yes, Ralph, you're too base.

RALPH

I am responsible for your corruption.

CADY

You haven't corrupted me.

RALPH

No?

CADY

One trip to a brothel is not grounds for corruption.

RALPH

Maybe you didn't do it right.

CADY

I'll have to go back and find out.

RALPH

You saw her breasts?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

And—

CADY

I saw everything.

RALPH

There is nothing more divine, more perfect, than a naked woman, Achilles. All the reverends may say otherwise, but at home, they worship women just like you or I.

CADY

What about naked men? Are naked men not divine as well?

RALPH

No. Not in the same way. There is nothing divine about what hangs between our legs.

CADY

Speak for yourself!

RALPH

I only ever speak for myself.

A moment of something. Chemistry? Whatever it is, Cady decides to change the subject.

CADY

What have you been doing?

RALPH

Burying the dead.

CADY
Oh. Already?

RALPH
Yes.

CADY
I told George I would send his body back to his mother.

RALPH
Who's George?

CADY
A Nantucketer. He died just now. Shot through the lung.

RALPH
Well, George will be living the rest of his days in the ground in Virginia.

Cady sits down next to Ralph.

CADY
The ground is cold.

RALPH
It is.

CADY
Do you mind if I sit with you? I'll be quiet.

RALPH (*laughing a little*)
Yes. You can sit here.

CADY
I have my blanket. If you're cold.

Cady takes her blanket out of her pack. She throws it over both of them.

RALPH
Thank you.

Ralph closes his eyes again. Leans against the tree.

CADY
How did you dig? If the ground is so cold.

RALPH (*eyes still closed*)
I thought you said you would be quiet.

CADY
Sorry.

RALPH

Just rest for a spell. There's plenty more war to come.

Cady closes her eyes. She leans against Ralph slightly. He opens his eyes, glances at her and then closes them again.

Chorus enters, dressed as mourning women. They look at Cady and Ralph. As the Chorus speaks Cady and Ralph fall asleep, lean into one another further.

CHORUS

Solid, ironical rolling orb!
Master of all, and matter of fact!—at last I accept your terms;
Bringing to practical, vulgar tests, of all my ideal dreams,
And of me, as lover and hero.

Look down fair moon and bathe this scene;
Pour softly down night's nimbus floods, on faces ghastly, swollen, purple;
On the dead, on their backs, with their arms toss'd wide,
Pour down your unstinted nimbus, sacred moon.⁷

The chorus exits.

The moon rises.

Ralph throws his arm over Cady. She jolts awake. She stands, trying not to disturb him.

He makes a noise, but doesn't wake. She tries to figure out whether to take her blanket with her. She opts not to.

CADY (whispers)

For a moment, I thought I shared a bed with Ezra.
His hot breath on the back of my neck.
His slight snore rousing me from sleep.

Is this what men in battle do?
Or is this something else?
My namesake Achilles, he would do this.
Often.

I should have stayed,
but I do not know whether I can keep my secret from Ralph much longer.
There is too much there.

I will be cold without my blanket.
It smells as if someone has lit a fire.
I love the smell of a fire in winter.

Cady exits.

⁷ Walt Whitman, *Drum taps*

The moon sets.

After a few moments, a bugle sounds.

Ralph jolts awake. He looks next to him, sees he is alone, but knows this is not his blanket. He looks for Achilles.

He stands. He walks off, carrying the blanket. His bones ache.

ix.

Lacy House Field Hospital. Hayward is in a room with a desk, eating bread, drinking coffee. Cady enters.

CADY

Doctor Hayward?

HAYWARD

Grey.

CADY

I came back. To see if you need any assistance.

HAYWARD

Good. I hoped you would.

CADY

I couldn't find the Chaplain last night, but I will look again.

HAYWARD

Rickenbocker sometimes wanders off after a calamity like this—you'll find him eventually with an empty bottle. Did you get some breakfast?

CADY

I did.

HAYWARD

And do Macy and Abbott know that you're here?

CADY

Yes, sir.

HAYWARD

Wonderful. I will begin by teaching you a few basics. These are not things that you will find in every Federal Field Hospital, but I have a bit of a reputation around these parts for being obsessed with sanitation. And the one thing I've learned about having a reputation in war times is that you have to maintain it, whether you want to or not. Certainly in the Bloody Twentieth.

Cady nods. Hayward stands.

HAYWARD

Follow me.

CADY

Do you need to finish your breakfast?

HAYWARD

No. But if you are still hungry?

CADY

No. I had plenty to eat.

HAYWARD

We wouldn't want you fainting in the hospital.

CADY

I have a very hearty disposition, sir. Despite my size.

HAYWARD

I don't doubt it, Grey.

A small, stout woman enters, Clara Barton.

BARTON

Dr. Hayward.

HAYWARD

Miss Barton, to what do I owe the pleasure of seeing you?

BARTON

A terrible battle, Doctor.

HAYWARD

Will you be staying with us long?

BARTON

I may. I just stopped by to say hello to you.

HAYWARD

Miss Barton, this is—I'm sorry, I don't know your first name.

CADY

Achilles.

HAYWARD

Achilles!

CADY

Yes. *(to Clara Barton)* Miss Barton, it's an honor to meet you. My name is Achilles Grey.

BARTON

A good morning to you, Private Grey.

HAYWARD

Private Grey arrived yesterday. Company I, 20th Massachusetts.

BARTON

What a day to arrive.

HAYWARD

He has already been very helpful to me, identifying the dead and dying and comforting them.

BARTON

I'm happy to hear that. I hope you continue your good work here.

CADY

I am eager to. Doctor Hayward was about to teach me about the field hospital.

BARTON

I shan't delay your lesson any further. I hope we meet again soon. Goodbye, Doctor Hayward.

Barton exits.

HAYWARD

I had said, before Miss Barton entered, something about upholding one's reputation.

CADY

You did.

HAYWARD

There walks a woman who adheres to that admirably. Many Union men could learn a great deal from Miss Barton. A woman without fear, with utter conviction, cool, self-possessed. A gentleman in crinolines.

CADY

What an honor to have met her.

HAYWARD

You will see her here often. Do whatever she tells you. Even if it goes against what I have ordered.

Now. Let us see to the dead and dying, shall we?

CADY

I don't think Abbott has much faith for me up at the front lines.

HAYWARD

Oh, you'll probably do more good back here anyway.

CADY

It's not cowardly?

HAYWARD

Am I a coward?

CADY

You're a doctor. It is different.

HAYWARD

It is no different. A doctor needs nurses, assistants. There are thousands of wounded men here now. Your assistance is greatly needed and appreciated. You are kind and you are smart. We will find a good place for you.

CADY

Thank you.

They begin to exit.

HAYWARD

Doctor Revere died in battle. At Antietam.

CADY

I heard.

HAYWARD

So thouris work is not entirely without the strains and stresses of life on the front lines.

A moment.

CADY

Did you know Ezra Hood?

HAYWARD

The name sounds familiar. Nantucket man?

CADY

Yes. I knew him well. He also died at Antietam.

HAYWARD

Yes. Ezra. He died in the field hospital. Blood poisoning, I believe.

Cady almost breaks. Hayward moves to exit.

HAYWARD

We will mourn them when the war is done. Until then, we will do what we must to win the war.

He claps Cady on the shoulder and they exit.

x.

The barracks. Night-time. Chorus dressed like soldiers, sitting around a fire. Ralph is with them.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Our captain stood upon the deck,
A spy-glass in his hand,
A viewing of those gallant whales
That blew at every strand.
Oh, your tubs in your boats, my boys,
And by your braces stand,
And we'll have one of those fine whales,
Hand, boys, over hand!
So, be cheery, my lads! may your hearts never fail!
While the bold harpooner is striking the whale! ⁸

Cady enters, drawn in by the song. She sees Ralph, turns back. Ralph sees Cady.

RALPH

Achilles! Come sit.

Cady turns towards the fire. She silently walks over to Ralph, sits near him, but not too near him.

RALPH

I have your blanket.

CADY

Oh.

RALPH

It's in my pack. Back at camp.

CADY

Thank you.

RALPH

If you want it—

CADY

The fire will keep me warm for now.

RALPH

All right.

They sit in silence.

Once the song is over the Chorus take on roles of soldiers speaking.

⁸ Melville, *Moby Dick*

CHARLES

When I get home, I will eat all the blueberries on my father's farm before my mother can yell at me. Or bake them into a pie.

ARTHUR

When I get home, I will marry Sylvia. Or her sister Caroline.

EDWARD

I'll move to California.

FRANK

Canada.

CHARLES

Michigan.

ARTHUR

Michigan?

CHARLES

I like the men from Michigan. And their sisters are pretty.

FRANK

I'll teach Nathan how to fish.

EDWARD

I'll find gold. I'll get rich.

ARTHUR

There won't be any gold left once the war is over.

EDWARD

There will be. I'll find it where no one else is looking.

ARTHUR

How will you know?

EDWARD

I'll go somewhere no one has been before.

FRANK

Sarah will want more children. Maybe I'll want more children.

CHARLES

You can always try.

FRANK

I *can* always try.

The men laugh, then silence.

RALPH

Half of us will be dead by spring.

FRANK

Ralph.

RALPH

Maybe summer. Maybe the winter will somehow spare us.

ARTHUR

Maybe the war will be over by then.

RALPH

How many of us enlisted in '61 thinking "nine months, easy"? I'll take my money, I'll fight for the Union. I'll fight against the tyranny of slavery?

And then the travesty at Ball's Bluff. We lost friends there. We lost friends at Antietam. We lost friends here.

How can you talk about what you're going to do, when you know you're going to die?

CADY

How can you talk of anything else?

RALPH

What do you know? You haven't even seen any action.

FRANK

Lay off him, Ralph.

RALPH

He hasn't. He shows up here *after* the battle's been fought and now he's pretending to be stoic about death.

CADY

I'm sorry if I've done something to—

Ralph stands and leaves.

CHARLES

He went home to bury his father. Did you know that?

CADY

No.

CHARLES

Ropes gave him furlough, which was good of him, but I wonder if it would have been better for him to stay here with us.

FRANK

Furlough's a pretty thing, but it's also a trap.

CADY

How so?

FRANK

You're home with your wife, your family, your friends. And you spend the whole time thinking about being back here. About the friends sitting around the campfire, about whether you've missed some important action. About who will still be standing when you get back. You have to talk about the war with people who only know how to talk about politics. About abolition. About Johnny Reb, like there's only two of them. Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

ARTHUR

Women treat you like you're a rare gem. They can't help but touch you, yet they don't know how.

EDWARD

Ralph will be fine.

He hands a bottle (stolen from the sack of Fredericksburg no doubt) to Cady.

EDWARD

Bring 'im this. It'll cheer him up. Man just needs some drink in him after being with his teetotalling kin.

CADY

Are you sure?

EDWARD

And take some for yourself, put some hair on your chest so you can fight.

Cady takes a hearty swig.

EDWARD

Attaboy.

Cady goes off in search of Ralph.

EDWARD

Pretty boy like that shouldn't be at the war. Like Willie Putnam. The pretty boys die early.

ARTHUR

That one says he's from Nantucket?

CHARLES

Him? He's not from Nantucket.

ARTHUR

That's what he says.

CHARLES

I don't know any Achilles on the island of Nantucket.

EDWARD

I don't know of any Achilles anywhere.

FRANK

The Iliad.

EDWARD

Wasn't on the Iliad.

FRANK

It's not a ship, fool, it's a book.

CHARLES

Lofty name. Mighty lofty name.

xi.

Ralph smokes a pipe outside a small cabin. Cady enters with the bottle.

CADY

They sent me over here with this. Thought you might want it.

Ralph looks at her and the bottle.

RALPH

Is it any good?

CADY

Tastes alright to me.

RALPH

Give it here.

Cady hands him the bottle. He drinks.

CADY

You didn't tell me that your father died.

RALPH

My father died.

CADY

That's why you were home.

RALPH

Surrounded by death here, surrounded by death at home.

CADY

How...

RALPH

He was in an accident. Hit by a cab coming round Boston Common. Knocked off his feet. Said he was fine. Two days later he was dead.

CADY

That's awful.

RALPH

My mother's lost. Edith moved in with her. And I don't think she's been enjoying that very much.

CADY

Edith or your mother?

RALPH

Both, really.

CADY

Well, I'm sorry. I wish you had told me. Losing someone you love is... a challenge.

A moment. Ralph looks at her.

RALPH

Who did you lose?

CADY

My brother.

Ralph looks at her.

RALPH

Anyone else?

CADY

No. Well.

RALPH

Well?

Ralph lightly touches her arm.

RALPH

Do you—

CADY

I—

Ralph moves closer towards her.

CADY

There's something you should know. But you can't tell anyone.

RALPH

Yes?

CADY

My name isn't Achilles.

RALPH

It always seemed a bit improbable.

CADY

It's Cady. I'm—

RALPH

A woman.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Yes.

CADY

So.

They look at each other. They kiss (one of those magical kisses where they both know, at the exact same time, what to do). He pulls away, but continues to hold her arms tightly.

RALPH

Cady?

CADY

Yes?

RALPH

You said your sweetheart's name was Cady.

CADY

I did.

RALPH

What was your sweetheart's real name?

CADY

Ezra.

RALPH

Ezra Hood?

CADY

You knew him?

RALPH

Of course. He was Company G.

It dawns on him.

RALPH

You're Cady. His Cady.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Oh. This.

CADY

I never thought.

RALPH

You can't be here.

CADY

What?

RALPH

You'll get killed.

CADY

I don't care.

RALPH

You don't?

Ralph looks around.

RALPH

Come inside.

CADY

What?

RALPH

Before the others come back.

CADY

What—

RALPH

Do you want to come inside?

CADY
Yes.

RALPH
Then come inside.

CADY
I don't trust myself.

RALPH
I don't trust you either.

CADY
Then why—

RALPH
I don't care.

Ralph kisses her, pinning her against the cabin. We hear the Chorus singing offstage, coming towards them.

Cady breaks away.

CADY
I should go back to my tent. I—

RALPH
Tomorrow.

CADY
Tomorrow?

RALPH
Some day. Soon.

CADY
How?

RALPH
We'll figure it out. You're obviously very clever.

Cady smiles. She starts to exit.

RALPH
It's cold. You need your blanket.

Cady stops.

CADY
Yes. Ok.

Ralph runs into the cabin. Cady waits, bops up and down a little, it's cold, but also so much adrenaline. She smiles.

She looks at the audience.

CADY

I did not expect *that* to happen.

Ralph comes back with the blanket. As he does, Edward and Arthur enter, still singing.

Ralph hands her the blanket.

RALPH

Thank you for this.

He holds up the bottle.

RALPH

And this.

CADY

Thank Edward for the bottle.

EDWARD

Yes. Thank me for the bottle.

RALPH

Thank you, Edward.

Cady exits.

EDWARD

Nice lad, Achilles.

RALPH

He is.

EDWARD

It's a shame that the pretty ones always die early, isn't it?

RALPH

I don't know. You're pretty. You're still here.

EDWARD

I am pretty. Aren't I?

Edward takes the bottle from Ralph. Drinks. Passes it to Arthur, who drinks. Arthur passes it back to Ralph.

Ralph drinks and then goes into the cabin.

EDWARD

Good night Lewis.

RALPH (*from inside*)

Good night.

Edward and Arthur look at each other, look at the bottle.

EDWARD

Do we finish it?

ARTHUR

I think we must.

They drink.

xii.

Cady enters. She is wearing her blanket. It's cold. She can't sleep.

CADY

My lips still burn. Hours later. And my mind will not think of anything else. I knew I wouldn't be able to keep my secret from him, but I did not expect—

He speaks very highly of his wife Edith. And has said that he would never stray from her. He said that at Camp Cameron. When we talked of Miss Melissa's.

I want him to stray. I very badly want him to stray. To feel his weight against mine again. His...

She smiles.

I know that the outcome is not pleasant. In the end. In the end, I am alone again. Widowed once, possibly twice, certainly left.

And if I wanted to become a man, then why am I troubling myself with matters of the heart. Matters of the flesh.

Not that I think men don't trouble themselves with matters of the heart and flesh. It has been made abundantly clear to me that these men think of little else.

I sought adventure. And death. I did not seek out love.

It is not love. I know it is not love.

But it feels like it. In some way.

Birds chirp. The sun is beginning to rise. She hears a rustling in the trees. She drops to the ground and covers herself with the blanket.

Eve, a fugitive slave, emerges. She's shivering, her leg is bleeding. She sees the blanket. She picks it up cautiously. Without looking Cady shouts.

CADY

Don't kill me.

Eve looks at her. Cady looks at Eve. Assesses the situation. Eve drops the blanket.

CADY

Do you want the blanket?

EVE

Yes.

CADY

Take it. I will find another one.

EVE

Thank you.

CADY

It looks like you're bleeding. The hospital is down that way. Maybe they could help you.

EVE

Where?

CADY

I am going there myself. I will show you the way.

EVE

Thank you.

CADY

I'm...*(she almost forgets)* Achilles. What's your name?

EVE

Eve.

CADY

Can you walk ok?

EVE

Yes.

Cady picks up the blanket and puts it over Eve's shoulders.

CADY

This way.

They exit.

xiii.

Lacy House Field Hospital. The hospital is dimly lit. The chorus enters. We hear the sounds of men moaning in agony, blathering about their homes, their wives, their families.

Cady and Eve enter.

CADY

Let me see if there's a doctor around. If not, I can probably wrap it up until he arrives.

Cady exits. Eve looks around, spooked by the dead and dying man.

CHORUS

Hanging from the beam,
 Slowly swaying (such the law),
Gaunt the shadow on your green,
 Shenandoah!
The cut is on the crown
 (Lo, John Brown),
And the stabs shall heal no more.

Hidden in the cap
 Is the anguish none can draw;
So your future veils its face,
 Shenandoah!
But the streaming beard is shown
 (Weird John Brown),
The meteor of the war.⁹

Eve starts to back out of the hospital, but Cady returns.

CADY

I couldn't find the doctors, they must be resting. But Doctor Hayward trained me yesterday, so I will do my best.

Cady finds some bandages. She pours some alcohol on the wound. Eve winces.

EVE

It's so cold out I couldn't even feel it. Must've scraped it when I escaped.

Cady dabs it, begins to wrap her leg.

CADY

Where did you escape from?

EVE

The camp across the river.

⁹ Herman Melville, *The Portent*

CADY

You've been travelling with the Confederate Army?

EVE

Yes.

CADY

I'm glad I found you. There are many wounded Rebels here. We will create a story for you. And keep you here, safe with us.

EVE

What kind of story?

CADY

Whatever you like. When you imagine a different life for yourself, what is it?

EVE

Freedom.

CADY

What do you do with your freedom?

EVE

I raise a family that's all my own. I marry a baker, so I always have bread to eat.

Cady laughs.

CADY

You're smart. Are you good with your hands?

EVE

Yes.

CADY

Perhaps I can train you to help in the field hospital.

EVE

I want to go to Washington.

CADY

For now you'd be safer with us. I will talk to Doctor Hayward and I will find a way to keep you here and keep you safe.

EVE

Thank you Achilles. You are a good man, to be so kind to me.

CADY

It's my duty as a soldier.

EVE

No it's not.

Doctor Hayward enters.

HAYWARD

Achilles! You're here early.

CADY

Yes. I encountered this woman near camp. I saw she was injured and brought her back here. I've bandaged her wound. And hoped that we could keep her out of harm's way at the field hospital.

Hayward looks at Eve. He looks at the wound dressing that Cady has performed. He looks back at Cady.

HAYWARD

This is good work.

CADY

Thank you.

HAYWARD

We can use all the help we can here. Bring the contraband back to the kitchen and find Mrs. Adams. We will keep her away from the soldiers, but we will find something.

Do not tell Abbott about this.

CADY

Yes, doctor.

HAYWARD

Abbott is a brilliant lieutenant, but he is not a humanist. And is not an abolitionist. Many of our *esteemed* officers are not. Keep that in mind in the future.

CADY

I will.

HAYWARD

We may all be Massachusetts men, but we are not all the same.

EVE

Thank you, doctor.

HAYWARD

You stumbled upon the right soldier tonight.

Eve nods.

CADY

Alright. Let's get you back to the kitchen.

HAYWARD

Then come back here and help me with the amputations.

Cady nods.

Cady and Eve exit.

Hayward looks at the carnage around him. He exhales loudly. He is tired, overwhelmed. He buries his head in his hands for a moment.

Just a moment.

He kneels next to a soldier.

HAYWARD

How are you feeling, soldier?

SOLDIER

My shoulder feels like it's on fire.

HAYWARD

Yes, we're going to fix that soon.

SOLDIER

Good.

HAYWARD

I'm sorry you've had to spend the night in pain.

SOLDIER

It's the way it goes, I've noticed.

HAYWARD

It is.

SOLDIER

Could be dead.

HAYWARD

Yes.

Two male nurses enter.

HAYWARD

Good morning.

They nod at him.

HAYWARD

Take this man outside.

They carry the soldier outside. Hayward follows.

We see a nurse administering chloroform, preparing the soldier for surgery.

Cady re-enters, she goes outside.

CADY

Eve is all set in the kitchen. Mrs. Adams is grateful for the help.

HAYWARD

Good. Now, if you could prepare yourself to help me with this man, we're going to cut him open here and here and then we're going to realign the bone. We'll probably have to take some of the bone out—and his arm might be a little shorter than it was, but I think we can save the arm.

CADY

That's amazing.

HAYWARD

Oh they've been doing this for centuries.

CADY

Really?

HAYWARD

As far back as Ancient Greece, possibly. Of course they didn't have chloroform. So it was a good deal more painful.

CADY

I imagine.

HAYWARD

I can tell you, by the time you're out of this field hospital, you'll be able to practice surgery at any of the finest hospitals in the country, the world.

CADY

Me?

HAYWARD

If you stick by me, you will.

CADY

Wouldn't I need to go to medical school?

HAYWARD

I think that could be arranged. After the war.

CADY

But I haven't even gone to college.

HAYWARD

We may be getting ahead of ourselves. But. If, after all this is over, you want to go to college, I'm sure a few letters from myself, Abbott, Holmes, could get you into Harvard.

CADY

Harvard.

HAYWARD

Harvard would suit you. And we've had a Nantucketer or two. I think.

CADY

You are far too kind, Dr. Hayward.

HAYWARD *(to the other nurses)*

Please go prepare the next patient and keep him on deck. This one may take awhile, but we want to be as quick as possible today. The longer we wait, the more men we lose.

The nurses leave.

Hayward begins his work.

HAYWARD

You see what I'm doing here?

CADY

I think I do.

HAYWARD

This is so the wound doesn't inflame any more than it already has.

CADY

Right.

HAYWARD

And then once we've opened up the muscle and the ligaments we can find the broken bone, take out the chunks and realign what remains.

CADY

So what can I do?

HAYWARD

At the moment, if you could staunch the bleeding when I make the incision. Try to keep ourselves a little cleaner today.

CADY

Yes sir.

He makes an incision. She staunches the bleeding.

HAYWARD

Good.

They work together silently. As they do, the other soldiers, who have been lying around moaning, stand up slowly and get into formation.

Ralph enters with two muskets, he hands one to the chorus member who has been playing Arthur.

The other chorus members stand for a moment, looking at them.

CHORUS

War! War! War!

I often think that in the future
when human character shall have deepened
there will be a better way of settling affairs
than this plunging into a perfect maelstrom of horror.¹⁰

The chorus exits.

xiv.

Ralph and Arthur on picket duty.

RALPH

So we lost Leander, Wilcomb, Winslow, Morris and Snow.

ARTHUR

And Swain. One of the Swains. Not sure which one. The others are in the field hospital. Thought we lost Murphey, but he just passed out and then found his way back.

RALPH

God.

ARTHUR

The Rebs were in the houses. And we were like sitting ducks, just walking down the streets like ducks.

RALPH

I'm sorry I wasn't with you.

ARTHUR

Don't be. It was hell.

RALPH

What hasn't been hell?

ARTHUR

I don't know.

Silence.

¹⁰ Dr. Perry, letter to his wife

ARTHUR

What do you know of this Achilles Grey? You came down from Cameron with him. He seems like a good man, a little soft, perhaps.

RALPH

Yes. A little.

ARTHUR

The Nantucketers say they've never heard of him. Isn't that queer?

RALPH

It is.

ARTHUR

But he says he's from Nantucket.

RALPH

Born and raised.

ARTHUR

How strange.

RALPH

Perhaps it's not as small an island as we think.

ARTHUR

Strange thing to lie about. Being from Nantucket.

RALPH

It doesn't seem worth it.

ARTHUR

Well, suss it out, if you can. The boys are curious.

RALPH

Sure. He's a decent fellow, I enjoy spending time with him.

ARTHUR

I know men have all sorts of reasons for enlisting, for hiding the truth, but—

RALPH (*sharply*)

I'll do my best.

In the meantime, Hayward and Cady have been performing surgery on the soldier. Cady is wrapping up his wounds.

HAYWARD

Soldier, you should heal well. We'll send you up to Washington in an ambulance and you'll recover there. But I think you'll retain full use of your arm once it's healed.

SOLDIER

Thank you doctor.

Cady finishes wrapping the shoulder/arm. When she is done, she turns to leave.

At the same time Ralph and Arthur are relieved from picket duty by two other soldiers.

Cady and Ralph see each other. She looks away.

ARTHUR

Achilles!

She looks over.

CADY

Hello Arthur.

ARTHUR

You've been at the hospital?

CADY

How can you tell?

ARTHUR

You're covered in blood and you smell like chloroform.

CADY

Oh. I hadn't even noticed. It's been a very long day.

ARTHUR

Come eat with us by the fire. We've just finished picketing.

CADY

I'm going to wash up a little before joining you.

ARTHUR

No need to clean up on our behalf. We've all become quite used to it.

CADY

It's a sanitary choice, more than anything else.

ARTHUR

Well, come join us afterwards.

CADY

I will.

ARTHUR

We've got some lovely hardtack. And salted pork...

Cady laughs. She and Ralph look at each other. She fidgets a little. A slight feminine gesture. Maybe she touches her face.

RALPH

Yes, you should join us.

Arthur turns to walk away. A brief stolen moment between Ralph and Cady. He stands close to her, holds her arm.

RALPH

Tonight?

CADY

I don't know how...

Ralph releases her arm.

RALPH

Just come to the fire.

CADY

Ok.

They separate, he catches up with Arthur.

xv.

Cady at the creek past the field hospital.

She washes her hands, her face, the water is cold, bracing, but it revitalizes her.

CADY

50 soldiers. From sun up to sun down. And Doctor Hayward handles them with such care. He'll examine them, he'll call over another surgeon and they'll decide on a treatment. Then I prepare the chloroform.

He trusts me to do the chloroform.

And then once the soldier is numb enough, we begin. Sometimes we have to restrain them. At first I thought it was because they could feel the saw entering their flesh, but it's not. They can't feel anything, but they thrash around just the same.

Then, we send the men off in ambulances, hoping they'll get to a hospital where they will receive further treatment or recover.

There is so much to learn.

She looks away from the audience. She smells a fire burning.

It helps keep my mind off Ralph, who has otherwise infected my brain like a fever.

I have never felt this way about anyone before. I actually *feel*. My skin. My nerves. My heart. They *ache*.

It hurts to be near him. And hurts something different to be apart from him.

Perhaps some chloroform would do the trick. Would cure me of this... whatever it is that is not love.

I will go to the fire.

She starts to walk.

I feel as if I am walking to my death.

She exits.

Eve enters. She looks at the audience.

EVE

I have never seen a man piss sitting down. It must be how they do it in the North.

Mrs. Adams and Achilles have been kind to me, but I do not like the other soldiers. They are no different from the soldiers I ran away from.

The white man will treat me like property no matter where on this country I stand. But I will stay at this hospital. For now.

Lights change.

xvi.

Soldiers sit around the fire. Ralph, Arthur, Frank, et al. They are drinking moonshine.

Frank tells a story that sounds like the Iliad and maybe it is from the Iliad, but it also sounds like it's from the Civil War. Everyone is rapt.

Cady enters. She sees how rapt everyone is. And she almost doesn't want to disturb them. She stands on the outside, listening to the tail end of this story, wishing that she could just be one of the guys, but knowing that really, she won't.

Ralph glances up and sees her, he picks up his haversack and goes over to her. No one notices, they are far too engrossed in the story.

RALPH

Hello.

CADY

Hello.

He walks her away from the fire, where they can't be seen.

RALPH

Did you eat anything?

CADY

Not yet.

RALPH

I found something you might like.

CADY

Salted pork?

RALPH

No. Even better.

CADY

Better than salted pork?

Ralph produces an apple out of his haversack.

CADY

Where did you find that?

RALPH

We were picketing near an apple tree.

He hands it to her. She inspects it.

CADY

It doesn't look too bad.

RALPH

I had another one from the same tree. Still tastes ok.

She's about to take a bite.

RALPH

Not here.

CADY

But I haven't eaten.

RALPH

It's too loud.

CADY

Ah.

RALPH

Come deeper into the woods.

CADY

Is it safe?

RALPH

Of course it's not safe, we're at war.

CADY

Ralph.

RALPH

Picket duty is very convenient for finding hidden spots in the forest.

CADY

You've planned this all out.

RALPH

I've thought of little else. Almost got killed twice, Arthur saved my life.

CADY (*whispers*)

Thank you Arthur.

Ralph takes Cady's hand. She shivers.

RALPH

Are you alright?

CADY

Yes. I'm—

Ralph smiles at her.

They walk off.

After a minute or two Frank finishes his story.

The men are still rapt. They pass the bottle of moonshine around, filling up their tin cups.

xvii.

A dark clearing, lit by moonlight, it's dark, sexy, and feels a little unsafe. Ralph and Cady enter.

RALPH

Well.

CADY

It's very nice.

RALPH

I thought so.

CADY

Can I eat my apple now?

RALPH

Yes. I think you're safe.

She takes a bite of the apple. She smiles.

CADY (through bites)

It's good.

Ralph puts his arms around her waist. She continues to eat the apple, apple juice dripping down her chin.

Ralph takes her hat off, tosses it on the ground.

He touches her hair.

RALPH

Short hair suits you, I think.

CADY

Thank you.

RALPH

Was it very long before?

CADY

No. Longer than this, but not very long. Seems impractical for it to be too long.

RALPH

With all the fishing that you do back in Nantucket.

CADY

Yes. With all the fishing.

Cady has finished the apple. Ralph takes it out of her hand and throws it away.

RALPH

Are you finished?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Was it good?

CADY

It was perfect.

RALPH

Would you like some hardtack now?

CADY

No.

RALPH

No?

CADY

No.

Ralph kisses her. She wraps her arms around his neck.

CADY

What if we get caught?

RALPH

Everyone is drunk. They won't come this way.

CADY

That was your plan?

RALPH

Yes. Buy a bottle of moonshine from a sutler and ask Frank to tell the story about Ball's Bluff.

Yankees think they can drink moonshine like whiskey. But they're mistaken.

He kisses her.

CADY

And when everyone is sick in the morning?

RALPH

Better them than us.

He kisses her. He reaches under her coat. She gasps.

RALPH

What?

CADY

Nothing.

RALPH

Is this...?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Yes?

She reaches to unbutton his pants. He falls to his knees, exposes her stomach, kisses it. He pulls her down to the ground with him.

RALPH

Is the ground too cold?

She laughs.

CADY

A little.

RALPH

I will admit, this is not ideal.

CADY

No.

RALPH

If we had a blanket.

CADY

Or shelter.

RALPH

Or if you were not masquerading as a soldier named Achilles.

She kisses him. They readjust themselves so that they sit, facing each other, her legs crossed, but pulled up to her chest, his straddling her. For now, a way to stay warm. He holds her hands in his, maybe blowing on them to stay warm.

RALPH

I never imagined that I would be devising ways to steal kisses from a fellow soldier while on picket duty.

CADY

No?

He looks at her earnestly.

RALPH

I am utterly undone by you.

CADY

Isn't it strange?

RALPH

It is.

CADY

What is this—do you feel?

She puts his hand to her chest.

RALPH

Your heart.

CADY

But why is it—

RALPH

Ask Doctor Hayward tomorrow.

She makes a face at him.

CADY

He told me today I should go to medical school. That if I survive the war he would sponsor me to go to Harvard.

RALPH

You've found another admirer!

CADY

I cannot go to Harvard Medical School. I'm a woman.

RALPH

No, but Achilles Grey could.

CADY

I cannot live as Achilles Grey forever.

RALPH

Why not?

CADY

I could never return to my life.

RALPH

You don't want to return to your life. Isn't that why you're here?

CADY

I could never remarry.

RALPH

You could carry on an affair with a man named Ralph Lewis.

CADY

As Achilles Grey.

RALPH

No one would know.

CADY

Dr. Achilles Grey.

RALPH

And his companion Ralph Lewis.

CADY

And *his* wife Edith?

RALPH

Cady.

CADY

It sounds very complicated.

RALPH

Why should we predict what might happen in the future?

Right now, we're in a forest in Virginia. All our fellow soldiers are drunk on moonshine. And the moonlight is hitting your face in such a way that makes it impossible for me not to want to, need to kiss you.

CADY

Romeo...

RALPH

You've somehow converted me into a romantic. I didn't think it was possible.

CADY

And you've converted me into a pea-brained *woman*.

RALPH

You are a woman.

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

You've said.

CADY

I am.

RALPH

I have no evidence of it.

CADY

No?

RALPH

For all I know you could just be rather boyish.

CADY

Oh?

RALPH

Not fully matured.

Cady climbs towards Ralph, straddling him. She takes his hand, places it under her shirt. He kisses her.

Lights fade.

xviii.

Lacy House Field Hospital. Morning, a few days have passed. Birds chirp.

Eve enters with a big heap of pine garlands, she places them around the field hospital. If possible, these should smell like real pine.

Doctor Hayward enters.

HAYWARD

Good morning, Eve.

EVE

Good morning Doctor.

HAYWARD

Does Mrs. Adams have you decorating for the holiday?

EVE

She thought it would be cheerful.

HAYWARD

It is. I'm sure the soldiers will appreciate it.

EVE

And it smells nicer too.

HAYWARD

It does. Cuts through the miasma.

EVE

You've been working hard.

HAYWARD

There are many injured men.

EVE

They were yelling with such excitement after the battle. It's so strange to see what they've done. How bloody it all is.

HAYWARD

It has been very bloody.

EVE

So much death.

HAYWARD

Did you travel up here with your master?

EVE

They brought me to cook, at first. But there hasn't been much in the way of fresh supplies for awhile.

HAYWARD

There's been very little for us in the way of fresh food either.

EVE

I figured if there was nothing for me to cook, then they wouldn't miss me. So as soon as the battle was over I ran.

HAYWARD

How's your leg healing?

EVE

It's good. Achilles comes by to change the dressing in the evening.

HAYWARD

That's very good of him.

EVE

Mrs. Adams thinks he has taken a shine to me.

HAYWARD

Mrs. Adams loves a complicated romance.

EVE

Do you think he has taken a shine to me?

HAYWARD

I haven't the foggiest idea.

EVE

Will you stay in this camp all winter?

HAYWARD

I do not know. Our movements are rarely discussed with me before we head out. It's a fine enough place to stay, but General Burnside may have other plans for us.

Cady enters. She looks great. A few nights of hot secret sex with Ralph have been very good for Cady.

She pats Hayward on the back.

CADY

Beautiful morning, isn't it?

HAYWARD

It's very bright, crisp.

CADY

Hard to believe it's almost Christmas.

HAYWARD

Yes.

CADY

The pine is a nice touch. Did you do this, Eve?

EVE

Yes. Mrs. Adams suggested it.

CADY

Very fine.

HAYWARD

You seem in remarkably good spirits this morning, Grey.

Cady looks at him.

CADY

Strange, isn't it? To be surrounded by all this suffering and yet to feel, somehow lighter than usual. I do not know what is causing it. I'm sorry if I seem improper.

HAYWARD

No. I find it refreshing.

CADY

What will we do for Christmas?

HAYWARD

I don't know.

CADY

What was done last year?

HAYWARD

The officers had a nice dinner. I don't know what the enlisted men did.

Cady inhales deeply.

CADY

The pine is so lovely. Thank you Eve.

Hayward and Eve look at each other.

HAYWARD

Should we get to work, Grey?

CADY

Yes, of course. Always more work to be done.

Chorus enters, dressed as soldiers, a fife and drum amongst them.

CHORUS (singing)

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold;
Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From Heaven's all gracious king.
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Hayward, Eve and Cady join in the song.

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever over its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Ralph enters. He stands next to Cady, they link pinky fingers, ever so surreptitiously. He sings. He sings well.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife
And hear the angels sing.¹¹

The sound of a church bell cuts through the silence at the end of the song.

¹¹ Edmund Sears, "It Came Upon The Midnight Clear"

Quick blackout.

End of Act One

Act Two

i.

Chorus (minus Eve) enters. They are dressed as senators, Washington men.

CHORUS (*this should not be spoken in unison, but divvied up—it can also be edited*)
By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States

and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth[)], and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN

WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.¹²

Eve enters. They look at her. She looks at them.

They exit.

Eve stands alone for a moment, savoring the words that she has heard.

EVE

Henceforward shall be free.

¹² Abraham Lincoln, The Emancipation Proclamation- January 1, 1863

Musket shots ring out. Eve hides behind a tree in fear.

Ralph and Cady run onstage, we are in the woods, their secret woods. They stop, a little breathless.

Eve remains onstage, she is about to go out to greet them.

RALPH

Happy New Year, Private Grey.

CADY

Happy New Year, Sergeant Lewis.

They kiss. Eve sees this, she does not know how to react.

RALPH

1863.

CADY

Full of possibility.

RALPH

Is it?

CADY

It could be.

RALPH

I forget that you still haven't seen battle yet.

CADY

I've seen the aftermath.

RALPH

Yes.

CADY

The aftermath seems just as bad.

RALPH

Wait until the next battle.

CADY

You don't think I'm suited to battle?

RALPH

You're –

CADY

I did my training at Camp Cameron. I am just as prepared as any man here.

RALPH

So you are.

CADY

And just because we happen to have arrived after the battle does not make me less—

Ralph kisses her.

RALPH

Please be quiet.

CADY

You don't like when I become argumentative because I tend to win our arguments.

RALPH

No, it is because there are things I would rather do with you than argue.

He kisses her again.

CADY

Do you think they suspect?

RALPH

Who?

CADY

The others.

RALPH

Suspect what?

CADY

Any of it.

RALPH

The men from Company I don't believe that you are from Nantucket, because they've never heard of an Achilles Grey from Nantucket.

CADY

Of course.

RALPH

I said I would do my best to suss you out.

CADY

Is that what you've been doing?

RALPH

It is very hard work, this sussing.

Cady kisses him, gets a little handsy.

Eve is still watching, she is mesmerized, she is confused.

CADY

Is it?

RALPH

Very hard work.

Ralph gets a little handsy too.

CADY

So the men from Nantucket believe that you are spending all this time with me learning my secret?

RALPH

And so I am.

CADY

And so you are.

Eve can't watch anymore. She runs off, making enough noise that Ralph and Cady turn in her direction.

CADY

What was that?

RALPH

A fox.

CADY

Are there foxes here?

RALPH

I don't know. Probably.

CADY

We should be more careful.

RALPH

You should move into the cabin with me.

CADY

What? No.

RALPH

Why not?

CADY

That's the opposite of being careful.

RALPH

Everyone shares quarters here.

CADY

But the two of us sharing a cabin? What about Frank?

RALPH

Frank can stay with Arthur and Edward. I'll tell them that the only way to really get you to trust me is if we bunk together. That I'm getting close to discovering the truth about you.

CADY

I don't know.

RALPH

We wouldn't have to come out to the woods.

CADY

I've come to like the woods.

RALPH

It would be warmer in the cabin.

CADY

It would.

RALPH

You wouldn't have to sleep in your uniform.

CADY

Oh, that would be nice.

RALPH

Think about it.

He kisses her neck.

CADY

I will.

He unbuttons her jacket. He stands back and looks at her.

CADY

What?

RALPH

How did a doctor ever let you enlist?

CADY

He seemed very preoccupied with other things. And was very old. He told me the war would give me whiskers.

RALPH

I hope it doesn't.

Cady laughs.

RALPH

Come here.

Cady does.

Ralph grabs her by the waist, kisses her roughly and picks her up. She steadies herself by putting her arms around his neck, wrapping her legs around his waist.

He carries her towards a dark part of the stage. Lays her down. We hear murmuring, breathing, etc.

Chorus enters, dressed as women in mourning again.

CHORUS

Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee,
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
Resting their wings where heath and fern leaves cover
Thy noble heart forever, ever more?

Cady cries out, a cry of passion and mourning and complication.

The Chorus looks to the dark part of the stage. They look back at the audience.

CHORUS

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world's tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!¹³

Cady emerges from the dark. She buttons up her coat. Ralph comes after her.

RALPH

Are you alright?

¹³ Emily Brontë, *Remembrance* (excerpt)

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Truly?

CADY

It is nothing. I felt—

RALPH

What?

CADY

I felt Ezra for a moment. And then.

She begins to cry.

Ralph takes her in his arms. He kisses her forehead.

Neither speaks for awhile, Cady continues to cry.

The chorus slowly walks offstage.

Drunken shouts from offstage interrupt this quiet, somber moment.

Cady and Ralph break apart. She looks at him and begins to laugh. He looks down, his pants are unbuttoned and slowly falling down his legs.

He pulls them up, buttons them and smiles at her, kissing her quickly on the cheek.

RALPH

Should we see what the fuss is all about?

CADY

I suppose we should.

He takes Cady's hand and kisses her palm.

CADY

Thank you.

RALPH

For?

CADY

I don't know.

They exit.

ii.

*Officers' Quarters, Falmouth, Virginia. Dr. Hayward, Henry Abbott, Henry Ropes and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. sit around eating a king cake, drinking brandy. It's Twelfth Night.*¹⁴

ABBOTT

The proclamation is an abomination.

HOLMES

I think it's very astute.

ROPES

What does it mean for our contrabands?

HOLMES

I believe it means they're free to do whatever they choose.

ROPES

But since we're paying them, they will likely opt to stay?

HOLMES

Presumably.

ABBOTT

The bloody slaves and the bloody abolitionists. We haven't been fighting this war so that *slaves* can be *free*.

HOLMES

Haven't we?

ABBOTT

Not I.

HOLMES

I believe that's the President's aim.

ABBOTT

The President's aim, to my understanding, is to have us all killed by promoting Ambrose Burnside over McClellan.

ROPES

God bless McClellan.

ABBOTT

McClellan never would have sent us into Fredericksburg to be slaughtered.

HOLMES

McClellan might not have sent us anywhere.

¹⁴ Holmes, at least, was in the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard!

ROPES

He sent us into Antietam.

HOLMES

Oh, I remember.

ABBOTT

Well, if we are expected to *enforce* this proclamation—

HOLMES

How's your arm, Doctor?

HAYWARD

My arm?

HOLMES

All the surgeries you've been performing. I imagine your arm is quite stiff.

HAYWARD

Oh, yes. It's been good to have a rest from it all. And I can safely say that not an inch of any member was unnecessarily sacrificed.¹⁵

ABBOTT

Hear, hear!

HOLMES

Well, I shall hope not!

ROPES

Were you performing circumcisions as well, Hayward?

HAYWARD

You laugh, Ropes, but it has been gruesome work. Truly despicable, gruesome work.

Dark silence for a moment.

ABBOTT

Would anyone like another slice of cake?

ROPES

I would.

HOLMES

Yes please.

HAYWARD

Why not.

¹⁵ Nathan Hayward, letter to wife.

ABBOTT

It's abolitionist cake! Holmes' mother made it.

HOLMES

My sister.

ABBOTT

Apologies, the card just said Amelia.

HOLMES

Mother doesn't make cakes.

ABBOTT

How am I to know that?

Abbott cuts cake for everyone, places slices on their plates. They munch on their cakes.

HOLMES

Oh!

HAYWARD

Are you alright?

Holmes retrieves a bean out of his mouth.

ABBOTT

Our King!

HOLMES

Oh goodness.

ROPES

It would be you, Holmes.

HOLMES

Why me?

ROPES

I don't know. It just would be. You missed the battle...

ABBOTT

Don't be bitter, Ropesie. He had dysentery.

ROPES

I'm not bitter.

ABBOTT

Just because you can't see the cake.

ROPES

I can see the cake. I do wear spectacles.

ABBOTT

So sensitive.

Cady appears at the door.

CADY

Pardon me, Doctor Hayward, I was told I could find you here.

Hayward looks to the door.

HAYWARD

Come in, Grey.

ROPES

Would you like some king cake? Holmes already got the bean.

CADY

Excuse me?

Ropes cuts some cake, plates it and hands it to Cady.

CADY

Thank you. Doctor, I'm sorry to intrude at this hour, but I've received word that Mrs. Adams said that you were needed at Lacy House.

HAYWARD

Did she say why?

CADY

I—

She looks at Abbott, Holmes and Ropes, who all look very expectantly at her.

CADY

I believe it relates to Eve, Doctor.

HAYWARD

I see. And Mrs. Adams implied that this is an urgent matter?

CADY

Yes.

HAYWARD

Well, then, I will go to Lacy House. But first, you should eat the cake.

CADY

Are you certain?

HAYWARD

Yes. Amelia Holmes, the younger, made it.

Cady eats the cake, trying not to betray her hunger.

HOLMES

Who is Eve?

Cady's mouth is full, she looks at Doctor Hayward.

HAYWARD (*lying*)

Eve is one of the nurses at the field hospital.

ABBOTT

What could be so urgent?

HAYWARD

That, I do not know.

Cady finishes her cake. She hands the plate to Ropes.

HAYWARD

Let us go.

Cady and Doctor Hayward exit.

ABBOTT

That man is named Achilles, would you believe it?

HOLMES

How poetic.

ROPES

Pretty youth.

ABBOTT

He seems rather attached to Sergeant Lewis.

ROPES

Oh, who wouldn't be?

HOLMES

Sergeant Lewis?

ABBOTT

You're always injured, you never know who anyone is...

ROPES

Lewis is Ralph Lewis. Married to Edith *Cabot*.

HOLMES

Oh!

ROPES

Very handsome tall blond man.

ABBOTT

Bit of an Adonis...

HOLMES

Oh, yes, yes.

ROPES

Achilles and Adonis.

ABBOTT

We can never escape the Greeks, can we?

HOLMES

Why would we want to?

ROPES

More brandy?

Ropes pours some more brandy for everyone. They clink tin mugs.

ROPES

The Greeks!

They drink.

iii.

Lacy House Field Hospital. Eve is on a bed, she looks very ill. Mrs. Adams stands next to her.

Cady and Hayward enter.

HAYWARD

How long has she been like this?

ADAMS

I went in search for her this morning because she hadn't prepared breakfast yet and found her in more or less the same state.

HAYWARD

Eve? Can you hear me?

She nods slowly.

HAYWARD

How long have you felt ill?

She holds up two fingers.

HAYWARD

Two days?

She nods again. He feels her forehead.

HAYWARD

She has a fever.

ADAMS

Do you think it might be typhoid?

HAYWARD

I certainly hope not.

ADAMS

Coming from the Confederate camp, don't know what she's been exposed to there. Poor dear.

HAYWARD

Eve, I'm going to examine you for rose spots. I may need to remove this.

He turns to Cady.

HAYWARD

Thank you, Grey. You may go back to camp now.

CADY

Is there nothing I can do to help?

HAYWARD

You have not yet treated a woman.

CADY

That's correct.

HAYWARD

I don't want to presume that you have seen a woman's naked body before.

CADY

I have, Doctor.

HAYWARD

Oh. Well, I will remind you that in these circumstances, a woman's body is just like a man's, a tool for diagnosis and site for treatment.

CADY

Yes sir.

HAYWARD

We are going to remove Eve's shirt and examine her body for rose spots, these are the tell-tale signs of a typhoid fever.

CADY

And if there are no rose spots?

HAYWARD

Then we will monitor her, see if some spots form over the next day or so. If not, then her fever and malaise are related to something other than typhoid.

Hayward pulls Eve's shirt up. He and Cady both look at her torso carefully. Mrs. Adams turns away.

HAYWARD

Do you see anything?

CADY

No.

HAYWARD

Me neither.

ADAMS

Oh thank heavens.

Hayward pulls Eve's shirt back down.

HAYWARD

Eve, I'm going to give you some quinine and some mercury just in case. I will check on you in the morning.

Eve nods.

Hayward turns to Mrs. Adams.

ADAMS

Thank you for coming, Dr. Hayward. Dr. Wilson wouldn't look at her.

HAYWARD

I believe she will be fine. It is likely a combination of the miasma of the field hospital and malnutrition from traveling with the Confederate Army. But it would be good to keep an eye on her.

Grey, make sure her quarters are sufficiently aired out. It's a little stuffy at the moment.

CADY

I will.

Hayward administers some medication. Eve sits up so she can take it.

HAYWARD

Good. I trust that you'll be up and helping Mrs. Adams within a few days.

EVE

Thank you.

Hayward exits.

ADAMS

Shall I help you, Private Grey?

CADY

No, I believe I can manage.

ADAMS

Come to the kitchen when you're done, I'm making some coffee. I know how much you boys like your coffee.

CADY

Thank you.

Mrs. Adams exits.

Cady goes through the motions of opening windows. Once she is done, she looks at Eve.

CADY

Eve may I look at your leg before I go?

EVE

Yes.

Cady pulls back a blanket from her leg. Her leg looks fine.

CADY

It's healed very nicely.

Cady turns to go.

EVE

I saw you in the woods. With the tall man.

Cady freezes.

CADY

What did you see?

EVE

You let him kiss you. I've never seen two men kiss like that before. It's not right.

CADY

Your eyes must be playing tricks on you.

EVE

And he comes by the field hospital at the end of every day and brings you an apple.

CADY

Sergeant Lewis and I are very close friends. You may be mistaking our friendly affection for something else.

EVE

I know what I saw. What I saw was not friendly. What I saw looked like you were in love with one another.

Cady reddens.

CADY

Have you told anyone what you've seen?

EVE

No.

CADY

Good.

EVE

I thought you liked me.

CADY

I do like you.

EVE

Not the way you like the tall man.

CADY

No.

EVE

You have been so nice to me, but I do not wish see you again.

CADY

Why not?

EVE

I do not like what I know about you. It taints you.

CADY

I see.

EVE

Please do not come back to check on me.

CADY

If that's what you want. But I will make sure that Dr. Hayward and Mrs. Adams are taking good care of you.

Eve does not respond. Cady turns to leave. Eve begins to cry.

Lights change.

iv.

Inside the cabin. Ralph sits on a bed, reading a letter.

Cady enters. He looks up, he smiles at her. She goes over to him, kisses him. She sits next to him.

CADY

How's Edith?

RALPH

It's from my mother.

CADY

How is your mother, then?

RALPH

She does not know what to do without my father in her life. She is despondent, she is confused. She has been so reliant on him for so many years that she fears she cannot go on.

CADY

Your poor mother.

RALPH

She has so many questions for me, but I don't have the answers. My father kept many things to himself. Important matters. And now that he is dead, it is hard to know where to look for the answers.

CADY

What kind of questions does she have?

RALPH

Financial matters, predominantly. She doesn't know where the money is. And she thinks that he told me, but he did not. So we are all in the dark.

CADY

Perhaps you should request a furlough.

RALPH

I just took a furlough.

CADY

Oh, yes.

RALPH

I have written to Edith. To see if she can help. Her father and brother are quite influential in Boston.

CADY

Oh.

RALPH

But this is not interesting. How was your evening?

CADY

Rather exciting. I ate some cake baked by the younger Amelia Holmes, I brought Dr. Hayward to the field hospital to check on Eve and I learned that we have been discovered.

RALPH

What?

CADY

Eve has seen us in the woods.

RALPH

What was she doing in the woods?

CADY

The woods are open to all.

RALPH

What did she see?

CADY

She saw you kiss me. When I told her she was confused, she said that it looked like we were in love.

RALPH

Oh.

CADY

She doesn't want to see me anymore. I believe she thought that I had affection for her. And now she thinks I am "tainted." Those were her words.

RALPH

Will she tell anyone else?

CADY

I do not think so. If she told anyone it would be Mrs. Adams. And Mrs. Adams loves a complicated romance, so she might actually find it quite amusing.

RALPH

But she does not suspect that you are a woman.

CADY
No.

RALPH
What should we do?

CADY
I don't know that there's anything to do.

RALPH
If anyone was going to see us, better for it to be a contraband.

CADY
Why?

RALPH
Well, it's her word against ours if she tells anyone. And who are they going to believe?

CADY
Oh.

RALPH
Did you say she was ill?

CADY
Yes, we thought it might be typhoid, but we couldn't see the signs for it. So we will continue to monitor.

RALPH
We?

CADY
Dr. Hayward thought it might be typhoid and then he told me what we were looking for. But I suppose I will not be monitoring now because she doesn't want to see me anymore.

RALPH
Does that bother you?

CADY
It does.

RALPH
It's important not to get too attached to anyone here.

CADY
I know.

RALPH
The paradox of being at war.

CADY

I think I've become too attached to you.

RALPH

Perhaps.

CADY

All my protestations and declarations of being a man. Of not being weak. And here I am.

RALPH

I do not think it is weak to be attached to someone you feel very strongly about. Perhaps it is even the opposite.

CADY

How so?

RALPH

Your love for me (if I may call it love)—

CADY

You may.

RALPH

--is merely proof that you have strength of feeling. Of emotion.

CADY

But isn't that womanly?

RALPH

Cady, I have never seen someone so in love as my father was with my mother. Her loss is so fraught because their attachment was so great. His as much as hers.

CADY

But now she is lost without him.

RALPH

Yes.

CADY

How does one avoid that?

RALPH

You can't. Or you can. With time.

But would you truly rather be out there in a tent with Johnny and his flatulence suffering through the cold winter *not* feeling anything. Or in here, with me, warm, safe, content, knowing that one of us will most likely end up with a broken heart.

CADY

Are those the only options being presented?

RALPH

I suppose, there is still the possibility of your becoming a doctor when all the hell of this is over.

CADY

Hmm.

RALPH

Or we die together in battle. But that seems far too romantic for either of us.

A moment.

CADY

Do you love me?

RALPH

I do.

CADY

And you love Edith?

RALPH

No. I have never loved Edith.

CADY

Never.

RALPH

There was a moment on our wedding day when I thought to myself, "If this is love then the poets have severely misreported it."

CADY

But you pursued her so doggedly.

RALPH

Well yes. But pursuit and love are not the same thing.

CADY

No.

RALPH

Why are you asking me these questions?

CADY

I cannot stop thinking about what happens after the war.

RALPH

Perhaps the war will never end. At the rate these generals are going, it's not too far from reality.

A moment.

CADY

This was perhaps a better idea than endeavor.

RALPH

This?

CADY

Enlisting.

RALPH

Enlisting is always a better idea than endeavor.

CADY

I'm being serious, Ralph.

RALPH

So am I.

CADY

If I deserted—

RALPH

If you deserted, you would get shot.

CADY

Not if I successfully ran away.

RALPH

If you deserted I would miss you terribly. I would die of home sickness, even though I would not be home sick.

CADY

Would you?

RALPH

And only Dr. Achilles Grey could save me.

CADY

Now I know you are mocking me.

Ralph kisses her.

RALPH

You cannot desert.

CADY

Why?

Ralph takes off Cady's shirt.

RALPH

Because your mind would be so distracted by thoughts of us, of this, that you would be captured by Rebs and sent to Andersonville.

CADY

Oh you think so?

Ralph removes his shirt.

RALPH

Without a doubt.

He pulls her towards him. He looks at her very intensely.

RALPH

Because I think of nothing else. Your eyes, your breasts, your mouth. The way you feel when you are beneath me. My mind flashes to moments when I am with you at all hours.

And I cannot believe that it is not the same for you.

CADY

It is.

His hand makes its way into her pants.

RALPH

So why on earth would you leave?

CADY

I don't know.

She kisses him. There is an animalistic quality to this sexual encounter that we haven't seen before. It's intense, it's frantic, it's desperate, it's hungry. Something has opened up between the two of them that cannot ever be closed.

The sounds and effects of a nor'easter, wind, rain, and men sinking in mud.

Chorus enters in the storm, carrying lanterns.

CHORUS

Not my enemies ever invade me—no harm to my pride from them I fear;
But the lovers I recklessly love—lo! how they master me!
Lo! me, ever open and helpless, bereft of my strength!
Utterly abject, groveling on the ground before them.¹⁶

We see Eve, covered in Cady's blanket, walking against the elements. In search of her new emancipation.

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, Drum-taps

Chorus lights the way for her.

v.

Late January. Holmes, Abbott and Ropes sit in a tent, reading.

Hayward enters.

HOLMES

Doctor Hayward. You've heard the news about Hooker?

HAYWARD

I have.

ABBOTT

We all expect he will soon make his grand failure and we patiently wait for it.¹⁷

HAYWARD

So eager to throw him to the wolves.

ROPES

You know his reputation?

HAYWARD

I do.

ABBOTT

Loose morals! Loose women...

HAYWARD

I often forget how young the three of you truly are.

HOLMES

I resent that.

HAYWARD

I've come because I have a request.

ABBOTT

Anything you command.

HAYWARD

I've been named Brigade Surgeon, as you know. And I'd like to take some soldiers with me. We would still be stationed here at Falmouth, but it would mean they wouldn't be in your ranks in quite the same way. Given that it looks like we're camped out here until spring, I thought it was a suitable time to make the request.

ROPES

Who do you want?

¹⁷ Henry Abbott, *Fallen Leaves*

HAYWARD

Private Martin from Company G, Private Grey from Company I, and Sergeant Sanderson from Company C.

ABBOTT

You have my permission to take Grey.

ROPES

Fine with Martin. And Sanderson should be fine as well.

HAYWARD

Thank you. I see a lot of medical potential with these men and I would like to continue to train them.

ABBOTT

So that they can become doctors?

HAYWARD

Perhaps. After the war.

ABBOTT

Are they college men?

HAYWARD

Sanderson may have gone to Dartmouth?

ABBOTT

Oh. I don't know if we count Dartmouth.

HOLMES

My father taught at Dartmouth.

ABBOTT

Your father ended up at Harvard.

HOLMES

I'm saying that Dartmouth counts.

ABBOTT

Would you like a brandy before you go?

HAYWARD

That would be lovely.

Abbott pours Hayward a brandy. He offers the bottle around Holmes and Ropes nod their heads.

ABBOTT

Purely for medicinal purposes, of course.

HAYWARD

Yes.

They toast.

ABBOTT

To Fighting Joe Hooker.

ROPES

And our new Brigade Surgeon Nathan Hayward.

They drink.

vi.

February. A camp-fire. Cady sits alone, she warms her hands.

CADY

I try to imagine what the island is like this time of year. Wind whipping, waves crashing, women scattering around in black dresses with shawls over their heads. What would I do if I were still there? What is to be done with no husband? No children? No family.

I know a few of these men. They are men I went to school with when we were children. I was Cady Wyer then and preferred playing with the boys even then. Ezra and I lived next to each other. On Cherry Street. We would walk to school together, but I insisted on carrying my books. He was more serious than I was. He was more scholarly. He wanted me to be more scholarly, but I didn't do it right. He took me to the Atheneum.

When we were thirteen we crammed our way in to hear Frederick Douglass speak. I'll never forget it. The whole way home, Ezra talked about how wonderful it was that these great men came to Nantucket, so we could get a sense of our country and everything that was happening off island.

My father never came back from his final whaling trip and my mother went numb. Eventually I think she died just from being too cold. Her blood turned to ice and she was gone.

I couldn't afford to get off island, so I stayed. And at 16 what was there to do other than marry Ezra, the boy who had always been keen on me.

I thought we would move to Boston or New Bedford, find work there, but his father lent him enough money to buy my mother's house and we lived there right next to his parents until he decided that he was going to join his friends and enlist in the army.

Thought if he cared so much about the abolition of slavery then he should go down there and fight for it. I pleaded with him. Told him that it wasn't our fight, that it was something that other men could die for. But he went. They all went. All those boys I was friends with. They left me with their wives. Their wives who scurry around the island in black dresses now. Or wait for the steamer to come with news. Who raise the next generation of boys to be sent off to war.

Ralph enters with his haversack.

RALPH

We received another shipment of vegetables and bread. I pushed my way through all the little pipsqueaks so I could bring this (*he hands her a loaf of bread*) and this (*some potatoes*).

CADY

Fresh bread.

RALPH

When was the last time you had fresh bread?

CADY

I don't even remember.

RALPH

November?

CADY

Mrs. Macy gave me cornbread before I left Nantucket.

RALPH

Major Macy's mother?

CADY

Yes.

RALPH

Did you know him?

CADY

I did.

RALPH

Did it ever occur to you to join a regiment that didn't comprise of men you already knew?

CADY

I didn't think it through. They said there was a company full of Nantucket men and I thought, "well, that will be better than a company of strangers." Or men from Western Massachusetts.

She breaks off a piece of bread. Chews it.

RALPH

How's the bread?

CADY

A little stale.

He hits her playfully.

RALPH

Ungrateful.

She breaks off another piece, she offers it to him. He tries it.

RALPH

It is a little stale.

CADY

What are we supposed to do with the potato?

RALPH

Quartermaster says we should eat them raw.

CADY

Raw?

RALPH

To keep us from getting scurvy.

CADY

You're not a risk for scurvy because you just had furlough. And I'm too fresh.

RALPH

Are you saying we should go against the quartermaster's suggestions?

CADY

Do you want to eat raw potatoes?

RALPH

Not particularly.

CADY

I didn't think so.

RALPH

We can toast them over the fire.

CADY

Or boil them.

RALPH

Yes. That could also happen.

He puts his hand on her knee, steals a kiss.

CADY

Where's everyone else?

RALPH

There were some hangers-on with the quartermaster. I believe they are preoccupied with them.

CADY

Prostitutes?

RALPH

Yes.

CADY

You didn't want to chat with the prostitutes?

RALPH

I did not. I thought I would find you. And here you are. The last place I looked.

CADY

You always find someone the last place you look. Because you've stopped looking.

RALPH

If I wanted philosophy I would spend time with the officers, Private Grey.

CADY

You should be an officer, with your breeding.

RALPH

My breeding?

CADY

Don't you come from the same stock as them?

RALPH

No.

CADY

You speak of money like you do.

RALPH

My father was a self-made man.

CADY

What did he make?

RALPH

A modest fortune.

CADY

And that goes to you?

RALPH

The will is rather imprecise.

CADY
Oh.

RALPH
Edith's father is still trying to determine what is what.

CADY
My father went out to sea and never came back.

RALPH
How old were you?

CADY
Twelve when he left. Fifteen when we found out he had died.

RALPH
And your mother?

CADY
She died within a year. And then I was Ezra's bride.

RALPH
And you never had children?

CADY
No. I didn't want them. I learned how to prevent them.

RALPH
Do you still...?

CADY
I have tried.

RALPH
Tried?

CADY
As far as I know, successfully.

RALPH
It would be quite a surprise. To the officers. For a child to *arrive* in camp.

CADY
I do not believe I would stay. If I suspected.

RALPH
No.

CADY

Instead I would arrive on Edith's doorstep, with a bundle in my arms, and offer the child to her. And then return to the Army of the Potomac. So I could be with you.

Ralph frowns a bit.

RALPH

That would be a rather bleak undertaking.

CADY

Perhaps she wouldn't want you back after that.

RALPH

And Doctor Achilles Grey and Ralph Lewis could live in Cambridge. Two bachelors about town. One on the up and up. The other disgraced and in shambles.

CADY

I would never do that to you.

RALPH

I know.

CADY

I don't know what I would do. But it wouldn't be that.

A long moment.

RALPH

In her last letter my mother suggested that Edith was with child.

Cady looks at him. Unable to speak.

She shifts away from him.

RALPH

I haven't heard anything from Edith about it. But. My mother—

CADY

Did you—

RALPH

During my furlough. Yes.

CADY

And. So now—

RALPH

I wish I could take it back.

CADY

But you can't.

RALPH

I know.

CADY

So you and Edith will have a child.

RALPH

It seems so.

CADY

I wish I could say that I'm happy for you.

RALPH

Yes. I wish I could say so too.

Cady stands.

RALPH

Cady.

CADY

What?

RALPH

I didn't know how to tell you.

CADY

Yes. I'm sure it was very hard.

RALPH

She is my wife.

CADY

I know.

RALPH

And she has wanted a child for so long.

CADY

Yes. How fortunate that you were able to provide her with one.

Cady walks away, leaving the bread and potatoes.

Ralph breaks off another chunk of bread, eating it slowly.

Chorus enters.

CHORUS

Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?

Did you find what I sang erewhile so hard to follow, to understand?

Why I was not singing erewhile for you to follow, to understand—nor am I now;
--What to such as you, anyhow, such a poet as I?—
therefore leave my works,
And go lull yourself with what you can understand;
For I lull nobody—and you will never understand me.¹⁸

Ralph throws the bread into the fire, it crackles.

vii.

Lacy House Field Hospital. End of day. Hayward and Cady have just finished looking at a patient.

Cady is exhausted, does not have the same exuberance she had back in December.

She coughs.

HAYWARD

That doesn't sound good.

CADY

I always have a lingering cough.

HAYWARD

All that cold sea air?

CADY

Maybe.

HAYWARD

I can give you something for it. It'll numb your throat.

CADY

No thank you.

HAYWARD

Are you feverish?

CADY

I don't think so.

Hayward reaches out, touches her forehead.

HAYWARD

Don't seem to be.

Silence.

¹⁸ Walt Whitman, Drum-taps

CADY

I thought winter was long on Nantucket, but it seems like it's long wherever you are. Even Virginia.

HAYWARD

Life is slow at the moment. It'll pick up in the spring. The cherry trees will blossom and we'll be skirmishing again.

CADY

Yes.

HAYWARD

We're fortunate to have this time.

CADY

Will you go home on furlough?

HAYWARD

I will.

CADY

When we start fighting again, you won't be with the 20th anymore, will you?

HAYWARD

Not necessarily.

CADY

And will I stay on with you? Or with Abbott?

HAYWARD

You'll stay with me.

CADY

That's good.

HAYWARD

I could take a look at your chest, if you wanted me to?

CADY

What?

HAYWARD

To check your cough.

CADY

Oh, no. It's nothing. I think it's improving.

HAYWARD

If it doesn't improve in a week, I'll do a full examination. Can't let my best nurse get sick before the spring.

Cady smiles at this.

HAYWARD

Now, you head back to camp. I'll see you in the morning.

CADY

Good night.

HAYWARD

And take this.

Hayward hands Cady a bottle.

HAYWARD

For the cough.

CADY

Thank you.

Cady exits, stifling a cough.

viii.

Ralph, Frank, Arthur and Charles sit by the fire.

FRANK

You taking furlough soon?

RALPH

I just went. In December.

ARTHUR

But Hooker wants all of us to get some rest, see our families.

RALPH

I'd rather stay here, I think.

ARTHUR

Mm. No interest in seeing the family?

RALPH

Not at present.

FRANK

I had a grand time at home. Ate all the scallops that were put in front of me.

CHARLES

Oh, scallops, I will add that to my list.

He takes out a little piece of paper and scratches on it.

RALPH

What's that?

CHARLES

My list of things to eat on island when I'm on furlough.

Ralph takes the list.

RALPH

Lemme see. (*reading*) Lobster, sweet potatoes, cranberry dressing, mussels, clams, scallops.

Good list.

CHARLES

These new rations are good, but I'm hankering for something briny.

Edward enters with his pack.

ARTHUR

Edward!

Edward throws his pack down. Everyone stands, they greet each other. He takes a bottle of whiskey out of his pocket.

EDWARD

Who's thirsty?

He opens the bottle, takes a swig and passes it to Ralph. He passes it to Arthur, who passes it to Charles. Charles coughs, they laugh at him.

EDWARD

It's the not watered down stuff the sutler's sellin'.

CHARLES

No!

They sit down.

CHARLES

Did you eat scallops?

EDWARD

That's your first question?

CHARLES

Did you?

EDWARD

I did.

CHARLES (*almost to himself*)

Two weeks. Just two weeks.

ARTHUR

Welcome back.

EDWARD

Thank you, friend.

ARTHUR

You missed nothing while you were away.

RALPH

Sometimes Abbott makes us go into Fredericksburg and pretend to shoot in buildings, but other than that, it's been quiet. Slow.

EDWARD

Good. You all look good. Surprisingly good.

FRANK

God bless Fighting Joe.

EDWARD

How're the others?

ARTHUR

In good spirits.

EDWARD

Where's Grey?

He looks at Ralph.

RALPH

Down at Lacy. Hayward's teaching him to be a doctor or something.

EDWARD

Is he due to come back anytime soon?

RALPH

He's usually gone til well past sundown.

EDWARD

Well, I discovered his secret when I was home. Thought you all might like to know.

Ralph sits back. Nervous, but not sure what this secret is going to be.

EDWARD

As we all suspected, there's no mention of any Achilles Grey on island. Nothing in the birth records. In fact, there are no living Greys by that spelling on island at all. So he's an imposter.

CHARLES

What else?

EDWARD

That's all.

CHARLES

So this Achilles Grey fellow is lying about being from Nantucket.

ARTHUR

Seems that way.

CHARLES

What an odd thing to invent.

EDWARD (*to Ralph*)

And in all your time bunking with him, he maintains that he's from Nantucket?

RALPH

I've tried to get him to confess to a number of things, and he always has the same story. He doesn't like to talk about his life.

EDWARD

So you can tell he's hiding something.

RALPH

I've seen it more as being a bit modest. Or shy.

ARTHUR

It's a puzzlement. Ralph, you have to do better.

RALPH

Grey's not bunking with me anymore.

EDWARD

Too good for you, now that he wants to be a doctor?

RALPH

Something like that.

ARTHUR

Well, I think it's time we find out the truth.

CHARLES

What are we going to do?

EDWARD

Rough him up a little bit?

FRANK

It's been far too quiet here.

EDWARD

Give him a little scare, let him know that we're onto him.

RALPH

Why?

EDWARD

Do you think it's acceptable for him to lie to us about who he is and where he's from?

RALPH

He's an enlisted soldier like the rest of us, he's saved lives and worked in the hospital tirelessly since getting here. Why—

ARTHUR

We all know you're keen on the pretty boy, but I didn't think you were this keen on him.

RALPH

I'm not *keen* on him.

ARTHUR

No? We don't see much of you, ever since the two of you started bunking together.

RALPH

Grey and I were very close friends for a time.

ARTHUR

But you aren't anymore? Was there a lovers' quarrel?

Ralph stands up.

RALPH

I will not sit here to be attacked unnecessarily. But if you are going to do something to Grey, I want no part of it. It's bad enough for us to be at war with the Confederates, but do we also have to be at war with each other?

Ralph exits.

ARTHUR

His wife is pregnant. I saw him burning a letter and glanced at what was left of it.

CHARLES

Oh, that's happy news.

ARTHUR

Not for Ralph. His wife is a beautiful tyrant.

CHARLES

Oh.

EDWARD

But you will rough up Grey with me, won't you?

FRANK

I'm always game.

CHARLES

As long as I don't get my furlough taken away.

EDWARD

Of course not. We won't do anything too harsh. Just show him a few things.

ARTHUR

When?

EDWARD

Once we finish this bottle? Think he'll be back from the hospital by then?

ARTHUR

Most likely.

EDWARD

Good.

They continue to pass the bottle around.

Lights change.

ix.

A tent, deep in the woods. Cady walks in. She looks tired and sad and worn out.

She coughs, it is a deep cough. It stops her a little. It doesn't sound good.

A noise, in the woods. She looks around, startled.

CADY

Hello?

Silence.

CADY

Is someone there?

She coughs again. She opens up her tent. She climbs in. We hear rustling inside the tent.

Four figures come out of the woods. Edward with his bottle. Arthur, Charles and Frank, with ropes, rocks, etc. As they speak they kick at the tent, throw rocks at the tent, shout, sing, scream. We hear Cady's scream from inside.

CHORUS

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!

Through the windows-through doors-burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with
his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering
his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!

Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer,
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the
hearses,
So strong you thump O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.¹⁹

At the end of the poem they have taken her out of the tent, she's wearing her long underwear.

Edward ties a rope around her neck. He's from Nantucket, so he's good with knots. It looks like a noose.

EDWARD

What do you reckon, this tree strong enough for a pretty boy like *Achilles Grey*?

CADY

Please don't kill me.

EDWARD

Tell us where you're from.

CADY

Nantucket.

EDWARD

Don't lie to me.

CADY

I'm not.

EDWARD

There's no record of an *Achilles Grey* anywhere in Nantucket.

Edward throws the rope over the branch of the tree.

¹⁹ Walt Whitman, Drum-taps

EDWARD

Hoist him up, Charles.

Charles scurries over the to the rope. But he does not hoist.

EDWARD

Charles.

CHARLES

Grey, just tell us where you're really from and we'll stop.

Cady stands very still. They all look at her for a long moment. Edward gestures at Frank. Frank walks over to Charles, taking the rope from his hands.

Cady is about to speak when we hear musket fire. The men scatter.

Cady stays standing, too terrified to move.

Then she coughs loudly, falling to the ground, clutching her stomach.

Ralph enters with his musket.

He goes to her side, tries to untie the knot, but struggles with it.

RALPH

Damn fishermen.

He holds her in his lap, kisses her forehead.

RALPH

You'll be ok. I'll get Abbott to dismiss them, I'll bring you down to the hospital and Hayward can take care of you.

He finally loosens the knot.

CADY

I can't go to the hospital.

RALPH

You're sick, you're injured.

CADY

He'll find out I'm a woman.

RALPH

You'll die otherwise.

CADY

No I won't. I've diagnosed myself, I have a pack full of medicine and I'll desert tonight. Everyone will think it's because of this. No one will suspect.

RALPH

What will I do?

CADY

I'll write to you when I find somewhere safe.

He kisses her.

RALPH

I'm so sorry about Edith. And the baby and everything. Don't leave.

CADY

I have to. If I don't run now I get caught.

RALPH

What's so bad about getting caught?

CADY

I can't go to Harvard if I'm a woman.

RALPH

You can't go to Harvard if you're a deserter either. You know the types of men our officers are.

CADY

You'll tell them about the others. You'll tell them I feared for my safety. That I didn't know what would happen to me if I stayed.

She tries to get up. Ralph looks at her, there's blood on her long underwear.

RALPH

Are you bleeding?

CADY

Oh, it's nothing.

RALPH

They made you bleed?

CADY

No, I'm—It's a womanly thing.

RALPH

Oh.

CADY

I'm bruised and possibly broken, but the blood is not their doing. Help me up?

Ralph does. She limps over to her tent with his help.

CADY

I was preparing my pack when they attacked.

A moment.

CADY

I've known Charles since I was 5, I knew he wouldn't hang me. Edward has always seemed far too warlike, even for war times. Arthur's not even from Nantucket, so I don't know why he cares.

I don't know why any of them care.

RALPH

I don't know. Perhaps they just miss the war, the winter's been too long.

She goes into her tent. She brings out her pack.

She walks towards him, throwing her arms around his neck.

RALPH

Don't go.

CADY

There's no other way.

RALPH

I'll protect you.

CADY

You can't. I can't ask you to.

He kisses her. She winces a little.

CADY

Careful.

He lets go. They look at each other.

He holds his hand out to her. She takes it. They stand like this for awhile, neither one wanting to be the first to let go. Eventually, she does.

She turns, she trudges off into the dark. Ralph looks after her, sadly and angrily.

Chorus comes out, dressed like soldiers.

CHORUS

War—I know it well, and the butchery of men.
Well I know, shift to the left, shift to the right
my tough tanned shield. That's what the real drill,
defensive fighting means to me. I know it all,
how to charge in the rush of plunging horses—

I know how to stand and fight to the finish,
twist and lunge in the War-god's deadly dance.²⁰

End of Act Two.

Act Three

i.

Lacy House Field Hospital. Midday. Hayward is there. Ralph enters.

HAYWARD

May I help you?

RALPH

Are you Doctor Hayward?

HAYWARD

I am.

RALPH

Sergeant Ralph Lewis. I'm a good friend of Achilles Grey.

HAYWARD

Yes, where is Grey? It's not like him to be absent.

RALPH

There was an incident last night and he left camp.

HAYWARD

What kind of incident?

RALPH

Some of the men from Nantucket found out that Grey is not from Nantucket. And they decided to rough him up a bit.

HAYWARD

But he is from Nantucket. He has said it many times. He knew one of our soldiers who was from Nantucket, recognized him right before he died. He even said he knew Alley.

RALPH

There is no record of an Achilles Grey being born or living on the island of Nantucket.

HAYWARD

Hardly seems reason to attack him.

²⁰ Homer, *The Iliad*

RALPH

When I arrived there was a noose around his neck. And he had been very badly bruised. He fled in fear for his life.

HAYWARD

Have you talked to Abbott about who is responsible for this?

RALPH

I haven't.

HAYWARD

As a point of pride or...?

RALPH

I have served alongside these men for over a year and a half.

HAYWARD

And they have caused injury to a young man.

RALPH

If you could talk to Abbott or Holmes about it, perhaps that would suffice.

HAYWARD

How do you know who did this to him?

RALPH

I was present when it was suggested. I interrupted the proceedings by firing off a musket to scare them off.

HAYWARD

These are very serious accusations.

RALPH

Yes, sir.

HAYWARD

But I cannot imagine Grey leaving without just cause.

RALPH

Yes.

HAYWARD

Do you know where he has gone?

RALPH

I do not.

HAYWARD

Good. I will talk to Abbott this evening. But I do not think there is anything to be done. A deserter is a deserter, regardless of the circumstances.

RALPH

Yes, Doctor. I wanted you to know the truth, though. And to know how much he respected you. And how much he wanted to become a doctor himself.

HAYWARD

Perhaps there's time yet! If he survives.

RALPH

Yes.

HAYWARD

Grey is fortunate you were looking out for him.

RALPH

I wish I could have done more.

HAYWARD

We always do.

Hayward puts a hand on Ralph's shoulder.

HAYWARD

I will talk to Abbott. Thank you, Sergeant.

Ralph and Hayward separate and depart.

ii.

Chorus enters, dressed like soldiers.

CHORUS

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

In pursuance of the twenty-sixth section of the act of Congress entitled "An act for enrolling and calling out the national forces, and for other purposes," approved on the 3d day of March, 1863, I, Abraham Lincoln, President and Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, do hereby order and command that all soldiers enlisted or drafted in the service of the United States now absent from their regiments without leave shall forthwith return to their respective regiments.

And I do hereby declare and proclaim that all soldiers now absent from their respective regiments without leave who shall, on or before the 1st day of April, 1863, report themselves at any rendezvous designated by the general orders of the War Department No. 58, hereto annexed, may be restored to their respective regiments without punishment, except the forfeiture of pay and allowances during their absence; and all who do not return within the time above specified shall be arrested as deserters and punished as the law provides: and

Whereas evil-disposed and disloyal persons at sundry places have enticed and procured soldiers to desert and absent themselves from their regiments, thereby weakening the strength of the armies and prolonging the war, giving aid and comfort to the enemy,

and cruelly exposing the gallant and faithful soldiers remaining in the ranks to increased hardships and danger:

I do therefore call upon all patriotic and faithful citizens to oppose and resist the aforementioned dangerous and treasonable crimes, and to aid in restoring to their regiments all soldiers absent without leave, and to assist in the execution of the act of Congress "for enrolling and calling out the national forces, and for other purposes," and to support the proper authorities in the prosecution and punishment of offenders against said act and in suppressing the insurrection and rebellion.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand.

Done at the city of Washington, this 10th day of March, A. D. 1863, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-seventh.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President:

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

The chorus fall in. They march.

iii.

Cady sits in the woods, huddled in a blanket, the sun is rising, she continues to cough, she looks bad.

CADY

Stubbornness is not a virtue. Certainly not when one suspects typhoid fever. If I had stayed, if I had revealed myself to Doctor Hayward, he would have taken care of me. He is a decent man. A man who understands that people do things out of necessity. He would understand, like Ralph understood.

Ralph was right. My mind imagines his mouth on mine, his body on mine. Flashes of his eyes in mine. Sometimes hours pass and I notice that I have thought of nothing else. This kind of love is a disease. It must be bled out.

I travel at night. I try to sleep during the day. Sometimes I come across an abandoned hut and I can rest there during the day.

Today I am too tired to go any farther. If someone finds me, let them find me. And let them be Union men, not rebels.

She closes her eyes.

Three Chorus members enter, they cover themselves in blankets. One of them is Eve.

She sees Cady.

EVE

Achilles?

Cady opens her eyes. She is happy to see Eve.

CADY

Eve!

Cady stands. She coughs throughout.

EVE

You are far from Fredericksburg.

CADY

I deserted.

EVE

You?

EVE

And the tall man?

CADY

He is still there. Where are you headed?

EVE

We escaped from a contraband camp. We are going to Washington.

CADY

I am hoping to travel to Washington too. I am quite ill.

EVE

They will not treat you if you are a deserter.

CADY

I do not plan to tell them I am deserter.

EVE

Is it that easy?

Cady begins to displays a manic quality that we haven't seen from her. Either from being alone for too long, or actually being unwell.

CADY

I will disguise myself as a woman. A nurse. I know how to be a nurse.

EVE

You do.

CADY

I haven't yet found a dress that suits me, but before I get to Washington, I will be the prettiest woman, you've ever seen.

EVE

You are the strangest man I have ever met. At first I thought it was because you were the first Yankee I had ever met. That all Yankees are strange, like you, but you are different from the others.

CADY

I'd like to think I am.

EVE

Why is that?

CADY

I'm not a man.

She smiles at Eve.

EVE

You're not a man? You're a soldier.

CADY

After my husband died I decided to enlist. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life mourning my husband.

EVE

And that's why I saw you with the tall man.

CADY

Yes.

EVE

He is very handsome.

CADY

Yes.

EVE

And he knows you're a woman.

CADY

Yes.

A moment.

EVE

Travel to Washington with us. There is safety in numbers in these woods. And you are not well. Perhaps I could take care of you?

CADY

I would like that.

EVE

I will not tell them you are a woman, it will confuse them. You are a soldier who has lost your way.

CADY

It's still true.

Cady picks up her pack, she walks over to the others.

EVE

This is Achilles. I met him after Fredericksburg, he wrapped up my leg and took me to the hospital. He's on his way to Washington.

CADY

I do not want to slow you down and put you in danger.

EVE

On the contrary. I think traveling with a white man will help more than harm.

CADY

Perhaps you are right.

Cady shakes hands with the other "contrabands."

CADY

Will you travel during daylight hours?

EVE

With you, we may be able to do anything.

CADY

I wouldn't be so sure. I'm very weak. It has taken me two weeks to get here from Falmouth.

EVE

Do you have the rose spots?

CADY

I don't think I do.

EVE

Do you want me to check for you?

CADY

No. I would rather not know yet. Wait until I see a doctor in Washington. Until I can be a woman again.

EVE

Yes.

CADY

I am sorry I hurt your feelings. I didn't want to. I wanted to tell you the truth. But I didn't know how. It seemed too important to keep the secret.

Now that I'm away from the camp, the secret doesn't seem to matter.

EVE

You are a very brave woman.

CADY

So are you.

Cady takes her hand, squeezes it.

CADY

How fortunate I am to run into you.

EVE

And I you.

They exit.

iv.

Officer's tent. Abbott and Holmes confer quietly. Ralph enters.

ABBOTT

Sergeant Lewis.

RALPH

Lieutenant Abbott. Provost Marshall Holmes.

ABBOTT

Doctor Hayward has spoken to us about the matter of Private Grey's desertion. And the alleged assault on his person the night that he left camp. Before exacting our judgment, we hoped to speak with you further.

RALPH

Of course.

ABBOTT

Desertion is a capital offense, as Private Grey must know.

RALPH

Yes.

ABBOTT

And this new proclamation of Lincoln's states that any soldiers who return before April 1st will be accepted without punishment.

RALPH

Yes.

ABBOTT

If you were to be in touch with Private Grey—

RALPH

I assure you, I am not.

ABBOTT

Yes. Of course.

HOLMES

Hayward says that you allege that Stackpole, Folger, Chase and Vine beat Private Grey and then made as if to lynch him?

RALPH

Yes, sir.

HOLMES

And how did you come to see this assault?

RALPH

I had heard that they planned to spook Grey. I was at the fire with them when the plan was hatched. And I went out to the woods, where Grey was bunking, to warn him. But when I arrived, it was too late, they had already tied the rope around his neck. I shot my musket and they scattered.

HOLMES

And then Grey ran off?

RALPH

Yes.

ABBOTT

Did you speak with Grey before he deserted?

RALPH

Only briefly. I did not know that he was planning to desert.

ABBOTT

And why did these men assault Grey?

RALPH

Many of the Nantucket men have suspected that Grey is not, in fact, from Nantucket. When Chase went home, he looked up Grey in the records and found nothing.

HOLMES

Did you ever ask Grey about where he was from?

RALPH

Grey always maintained that he was from Nantucket. From the first day I met him.

HOLMES

And whom do you believe?

RALPH

I do not know.

ABBOTT

If Grey returns by April 1st, we will welcome him back—per our President's proclamation—though I would rather he didn't just proclaim things from on high like some sort of *God*.

HOLMES

And we will speak to the men you have accused of assaulting him. It is not acceptable for this behavior to take place in our camp.

Certainly not from our upstanding men of New England.

ABBOTT

The Dutch-men and the contrabands, perhaps. But not our stoical Nantucketers.

HOLMES

The winter has been long. Our men are tired.

RALPH

Yes.

ABBOTT

Thank you, Lewis. This was most helpful.

RALPH

Thank you.

Ralph turns to leave.

RALPH

Grey had hoped to train as a doctor after the war. Could he...?

HOLMES

If he were to return before April 1st. Yes, that would be acceptable. If not, he will have a permanent black mark on his record. Unless he were to change his identity, medical training would seem unlikely.

RALPH

Yes, sir.

ABBOTT

You say you are not in touch with Grey, but if you were to express this to him, it would certainly behoove him.

RALPH

I would still be concerned for his safety in the Regiment, sir. At the hands of the other men.

ABBOTT

Safety at war seems too much to ask for a man who has lied about his identity and deserted. At this point, Grey's life is very much in the balance. I would urge you to cease campaigning on his behalf. We are surrounded by death and must accept it.

RALPH

This is what it has come to.

ABBOTT

This is what it always was.

Ralph exits the tent.

A letter drops from the sky. He looks at it, expectantly. A moment.

Then, Cady enters. As she speaks, she changes out of her military clothes into a dress (it is not full mourning attire).

CADY

March 23, 1863

Dear Sgt. Lewis,

I write to you from Washington. I arrived here a number of weeks ago, very ill, but fortunate to have run into some kind friends along the way. My cough has subsided and I am in good spirits now. Soon I believe I will begin to work as a nurse. As you know, I am well-trained in battlefield injuries, so will be an asset to the doctors and soldiers here.

I hope you are safe at Falmouth. Write back to me here if you choose. I would very much like to hear from you.

Cady Hood

Cady looks at Ralph. He picks up the letter, putting it in his jacket.

v.

A severe-looking nurse enters, she brings Cady a cup of coffee.

NURSE

Here you go.

CADY

Thank you.

NURSE

You have training already?

CADY

I have done some nursing.

NURSE

Where are you from?

CADY

Nantucket.

NURSE

And what brings you all the way to Washington?

CADY

My husband died at Antietam. I wanted to do something to help the other soldiers.

NURSE

Were you a nurse in Nantucket?

CADY

No, before I arrived in Washington I volunteered at a field hospital in Virginia.

NURSE

So I will not have to give you my speech about the men.

CADY

I don't think so.

NURSE

Our primary goal is keep the men comfortable, to keep the men alive and comfortable to the best of our abilities. We are not here to flirt with them or remind them of their sweethearts, though if we do and it doesn't interfere with our work that's acceptable.

CADY

Yes. I am not here for romance.

NURSE

You say your husband died at Antietam?

CADY

Yes.

NURSE (*noticing Cady's dress*)

You're not in full mourning.

CADY

No.

NURSE

Why is that?

CADY

I discovered at the field hospital that it made the men think of themselves, of their own wives.

NURSE

But what of your husband's memory?

CADY

Is it required of the hospital that I wear full mourning?

NURSE

It is not.

CADY

How long have you been at the hospital?

NURSE

Since the summer.

CADY

Did you lose someone as well?

NURSE

No, my brother is fighting. I am not married.

CADY

Where are you from?

NURSE

Baltimore.

CADY

Do you have a sweetheart?

NURSE

I do not. I am far too busy here for a sweetheart. And you will find that to be true as well.

CADY

Yes.

NURSE

The nurses looking for sweethearts do not have the soldiers in mind. They have themselves in mind.

CADY

Sometimes you can't help but—

NURSE

You can. You can always help it. I find.

A moment.

NURSE

Did you find yourself in harm's way at the field hospital?

CADY

Not often. I arrived after the Battle at Fredericksburg and then there was very little fighting after that.

NURSE

That's fortunate.

CADY

It was.

NURSE

Well, winter is over.

CADY

Yes.

NURSE

And the fighting will be sure to resume.

CADY

Yes.

NURSE

Will you be well enough to start in the next day or two?

CADY

Yes.

NURSE

Do you know what it was you had?

CADY

A fever of some kind. They don't think it was typhoid.

NURSE

It's very common for the female nurses to get ill.

CADY

It's common for the soldiers to get ill as well.

NURSE

Yes. This war, it just makes everyone ill.

Cady looks at the nurse.

CADY

When should I report back tomorrow?

NURSE

Early. Sun up.

CADY

I look forward to getting back to nursing. I felt useless being so laid up.

NURSE

Yes. It will be nice to have another experienced nurse around.

Chorus enters, dressed like wounded soldiers.

CHORUS

It is curious how rapidly the mind adjusts itself under some circumstances to entirely new relations – I thought for awhile that I was dying and it seemed the most natural thing in the world – The moment that hope of life returned to seemed as abhorrent to nature as ever that I should die.²¹

While the Chorus speaks, Cady changes into a nurse's outfit.

A letter drops. Cady looks at it.

vi.

Ralph enters.

RALPH

April 12, 1863

Dear Mrs. Hood,

What a pleasant surprise to receive your letter and hear that you are thriving in Washington. We are still stationed in Falmouth, but expect to move any day now. Hooker is moving other Regiments around and we expect to be one of them soon.

Many things have changed in the camp over the past month. Private Grey deserted, which was rather sad and surprising for me. I have attempted to keep his reputation sound after his incident with the other Nantucket men, but my pleas have fallen on deaf ears. The Harvard men, you understand, have a very strong sense of moral fiber. I only hope that he has found happiness and safety. I do worry about him.

Which hospital are you stationed at? If any injury befalls me, I will be sure to send my ambulance there.

Cady smiles at this.

Do write back. Your words are much appreciated.

Yours with affection,

²¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., *Touched with Fire*

RFL

He exits.

She picks up the letter, she stuffs it into her pocket quickly. The chorus soldiers are now in beds.

vii.

Washington hospital. Cady sits next to a soldier on a bed.

CADY

Are you feeling better today?

SOLDIER

No.

CADY

Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?

SOLDIER

No.

CADY

Is there anyone back at home you would like to write a letter to?

SOLDIER

My mamma.

CADY

Shall I write for you?

SOLDIER

Would you?

CADY

Of course.

SOLDIER

She's awful worried about me out here.

Cady takes out paper and a pen.

CADY

Where are you from?

SOLDIER

Illinois.

CADY

What would you like to say? I'll write it down.

SOLDIER

Mamma,

In hospital in Washington. Lost my leg on the battlefield. Lots of love to you and Papa and Viv.

Peter

CADY

Is that all?

SOLDIER

Yes.

CADY

I'm sure your mother will be happy to hear from you.

SOLDIER

Yes.

CADY

Do you have a sweetheart you'd like to write to?

SOLDIER

No. Not at present.

Hayward enters. Cady recognizes him, smiles. Hayward doesn't recognize her, obviously.

HAYWARD

Nurse, I'm looking for Private Walker, do you know where he is?

CADY

Yes, sir, he's in the bed next to the back wall.

HAYWARD

Thank you.

CADY

He's a little irritable when you wake him, but usually feels better after a few minutes.

HAYWARD

Thank you.

Hayward looks at her like, "do I know you?"

CADY

Are you new to the hospital?

HAYWARD

No. Walker's mother is a friend. I told her I would check on him while I'm here in Washington.

CADY

That's very kind of you.

HAYWARD

The surgeon said he's doing well?

CADY

Yes, I think he will be fine.

There was concern that he was at risk of inflammation, but the other nurses and I have monitored him. And I've given him extra tincture of iodine when I have it.

HAYWARD

Very wise.

CADY

He's a nice young man.

HAYWARD

Did you train here in this hospital?

CADY

I was in a field hospital before I arrived in Washington. I learned everything I know from a very kind doctor.

HAYWARD

I was at Lacy House, in Virginia, and while I tried to train the nurses, I found it was difficult unless the nurses were very interested in learning.

CADY

I'm sure.

HAYWARD

I recently had the misfortune of losing one of my best nurses, a young man, who deserted after an incident with a few other soldiers. I had hoped he would become a doctor after the war.

CADY

How sad.

She becomes a little emotional.

HAYWARD

Thank you for your assistance, Miss?

CADY

Hood.

HAYWARD

Miss Hood. A pleasure to meet you. May the remainder of the war treat you well.

CADY

And you, sir.

Hayward exits.

Cady takes a handkerchief out of her pocket to dry her eyes.

A minié ball falls out of the handkerchief. It rolls across the stage. She chases after it. She grabs it. She picks it up.

She dabs at the corners of her eyes with the handkerchief. The soldier looks at her.

SOLDIER

Are you alright, Miss?

CADY

Yes. Thank you.

She looks at the soldier.

CADY

Let me get your mother's address so we can send this letter with today's post.

She holds the piece of paper in her hand.

The wounded soldiers exit.

Ralph enters.

viii.

A letter falls from the sky. Ralph looks at it.

CADY

April 18, 1863

Dearest Ralph,

Today I saw Dr. H. at the hospital. How wonderful to see him and yet also bittersweet. It made me think of our days in the woods. I often think of our days in the woods. The time we made for one another.

There is no such excitement in my life here in Washington. I work in the hospital all day and barely have the energy to crawl into my bunk at night. Only to wake up before dawn and start again.

The men are kind to me. The doctors are as well. They are impressed with the knowledge that I have from my work in the field hospital. They tell me I should continue nursing after the war. That I am naturally suited to nursing. No one has suggested that I become a doctor.

Write back when you can.

Yours,
Cady

RALPH
April 26, 1863

Dearest Cady,

Your life sounds remarkably similar to life in Falmouth. And what a coincidence that you saw Dr. H. If only he knew!

I believed that the last time we saw one another would be the last I would ever hear from you. It is such a pleasure to read your letters and to know that you are safe and well in Washington. One day, when we reunite, I will hear the full story of your adventures. I look forward to that day.

Yours with affection,
RFL

CADY
May 2, 1863

Dearest Ralph,

Washington is getting warmer, more humid, the days are getting longer. Soldiers stream in. I am up all day cleaning them, writing letters for them, comforting them. There are so many of them. I wish every day that I could see your face. But I know I must stay here. I know I cannot return.

Tell me everything about the spring in Virginia. How I miss Virginia.

Yours,
Cady

RALPH
May 8, 1863

Dearest Mrs. Hood,

Spring in Virginia, like any season in Virginia, is rife with the Virginia Quickstep. One must be very careful where one treads, lest you step in something unsanitary. But you likely aren't asking about the state of the guts of our men.

We fought in Fredericksburg again. I suppose for me, the first time. Once again this city has no love for the 20th. We fought for 5 straight days and then we marched back to Falmouth to assess the damage. Two men killed, sixteen wounded.

On our march back to Falmouth, the strongest temptation was through the cherry trees. The road was lined with them of every variety and in perfection and yet on we marched right under them leaving them behind.²²

RFL

CADY

May 16, 1863

Dearest RFL,

You write of temptation as if you have any familiarity with it. I cannot imagine a soldier as resolute and strong could have any true knowledge of temptation. Particularly of stone fruit.

Do you have a furlough approaching? Or any reason to come to Washington other than grave injury? Were you not injured at all in Fredericksburg?

Yours with great affection,
CH

RALPH

May 25, 1863

I have spoken to Abbott about furlough (you didn't think I would, did you?), he laughed at me. I responded by asking him if there was any work for me on behalf of the regiment in Washington. He laughed again. He said I should ask Hooker, as he has the same proclivities as I. I assured him I was not attempting to revisit Miss Melissa's. He laughed a third time. I have never seen Abbott exercise as much mirth as I believe I have caused him. I wish you could have seen it.

The men are reckless and restless. Tired of Falmouth, tired of war, tired of being away from the women they love. I am among them.

Yours affectionately,
RFL

They move towards one another. Almost touching.

CADY

It appears the only way you will be able to come to Washington is in an ambulance. Is there another battle coming up? Or is self-harm the only way? You should have fought more bravely in Fredericksburg, we would already have been reunited.

CH

²² Paul Revere, Letters

RALPH

I shall endeavor to be braver in future battles. Not for the Union. Not for the abolition of slavery. Not for the Bloody Twentieth. But for you and your damned eyes—

He kisses her. Letters fall from the sky. They break apart.

RALPH

Tomorrow we march to Gettysburg. Pennsylvania. More soon.

They separate.

CADY

Months of writing letters to Ralph, hoping that they won't be intercepted by anyone who knows my true name. My hopes of forgetting him in my work at the hospital were naïve. I wait impatiently for his letters, seeking hidden meaning behind the words.

I feel now that I would risk death to see him again. To be held by him again. To kiss his perfect lips. To sleep curled within his arms. Thoughts of him make me irrational.

After the holiday I will become Achilles Grey again.

I will find Doctor Hayward and plead with him to be pardoned. Hayward is kind. He will understand. He spoke fondly of me when I met him at the hospital. He will write to Abbott and Holmes and they will reinstate me in the 20th.

And I will see Ralph.

She smiles.

The sounds of cannon fire and muskets.

Lights change.

ix.

Gettysburg. Henry Ropes sits under a tree, reading Dickens (no one knows which Dickens). He is calm.

Two other chorus members are playing cards. Ralph is there.

The sound of a cannon. Ropes is hit from the back.

ROPES

I am killed.

He slumps. Everyone around him looks shocked, surprised, terrified.

Music plays, muskets fire.

Soldiers run around shouting, screaming, falling, dying, getting back up again. Shouts of "Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!"

Ralph is hit. He falls.

Around him more shouting, screaming falling, dying.

In all the chaos, we lose track of Ralph.

Cady enters, waving an American flag, she's with another nurse, they are arm in arm. Patriotic music, shouting, etc.

The soldiers continue to run around them, then they turn into Fourth of July revelers.

CADY

Is it like this every year?

NURSE

It wasn't last year.

CADY

It's a double celebration this year.

NURSE

Yes.

The sound of ambulances streaming through Washington.

CADY

We should get back to the hospital. The men are starting to arrive from Gettysburg.

NURSE

I hope Tommy isn't one of them.

CADY

Ralph would have been there.

NURSE

We can take some comfort in knowing that it was a Union victory.

CADY

Yes.

NURSE

And hope that if they died they died well. With thoughts of God.

CADY

I don't think Ralph would think of God as he lay dying.

NURSE

Is Ralph a heathen?

CADY

Ralph worships women above God.

NURSE

That is fortunate for you, but not for his soul.

CADY

Yes. I suppose that is true.

NURSE

Will you marry at the end of the war?

Cady considers.

CADY

I do not know.

NURSE

His worship does not extend to the sacrament of marriage?

CADY

Ours is a more complicated situation. I am a widow.

NURSE

How does that affect any future marriage?

CADY

We should get back to the hospital. We have celebrated enough.

NURSE

Tommy gave me a ring during his last furlough.

CADY

Tommy sounds like a very nice man.

NURSE

Ralph sounds like a scoundrel.

CADY

Oh. I assure you, he is.

Nurse looks at her a little wide-eyed.

Fireworks, shouts. Nurse and Cady scurry off towards the hospital.

A bell tolls. 6 o'clock.

x.

Members of the chorus enter as nurses.

During the poem Cady enters, she works, she searches for Ralph, she is exhausted and manic and frenzied.

CHORUS

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death!
In mercy come quickly.)

From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it.

I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep,
But a day or two more, for see the frame all wasted and sinking,
And the yellow-blue countenance see.

I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bullet-wound,
Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so sickening, so offensive,
While the attendant stands behind aside me holding the tray and pail.

I am faithful, I do not give out,
The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdomen,
These and more I dress with impassive hand, (yet deep in my breast a fire, a burning
flame.)²³

At the end, the nurses leave.

CADY

August 1, 1863

Dearest Ralph,

No word since you marched to Gettysburg. I have searched every hospital, I have pored over lists of the men killed in action. I see no trace of you. Please write back so I know you are safe. I cannot sleep. I think only of you. Must I pull on my trousers and come find you? I will.

Yours evermore,
CH

Abbott enters, he sees a letter drop. He looks exhausted and melancholy.

Cady exits.

xi.

Hayward enters, Abbott looks up, Hayward salutes.

²³ Walt Whitman, Drum-Taps

HAYWARD
Commander.

Abbott coughs.

ABBOTT
Don't feel like much of a commander. I can't shake this cough and my body can't stay warm.

HAYWARD
I'll pour you some brandy.

Hayward pours brandy for both of them,

ABBOTT
It's good to see a friendly face. It seems everyone else is dead.

HAYWARD
We lost Ropes, Revere, Shaw

ABBOTT
Paine. Mason. Macy's hand.

HAYWARD
Macy doesn't need that hand.

ABBOTT
I suppose he doesn't. Though his wife might disagree.

HAYWARD
There's still Holmes.

ABBOTT
Yes, Homey keeps managing to keep himself above the fray.

Hayward laughs.

HAYWARD
He has been laid up with that foot.

ABBOTT
Always something with him.

HAYWARD
You, on the other hand, appear to be made of iron. A regular *Monitor*.

ABBOTT
It's just a matter of time, isn't it?

HAYWARD
One never knows.

ABBOTT

Holmes wrote after Ropes' funeral. A shame I couldn't be there.

HAYWARD

Yes.

ABBOTT

He *would* die that way. Reading Dickens.

HAYWARD

Which Dickens?

ABBOTT

I never asked.

HAYWARD

I suppose there were other, more pressing, matters.

A moment.

ABBOTT

Did you come across Sergeant Lewis, in your work at the hospital?

HAYWARD

No. I don't believe so.

ABBOTT

No one's seen him since the 3rd of July. Whether he's dead in a ditch or deserted or—whichever. It's a mystery.

HAYWARD

Rickenbocker hasn't kept track?

ABBOTT

Rickenbocker is spending most of his time with a bottle of brandy and much less time tending to the needs of the 20th.

HAYWARD

I see.

ABBOTT

A few days ago I received a mysterious letter for Lewis. My boy had been carrying it around, unable to find Lewis and brought it to me.

HAYWARD

What's in the letter?

ABBOTT

It seems our Adonis had a secret love.

HAYWARD

Isn't he married to Edith Cabot?

ABBOTT

Yes. And from what I've heard she's expecting a child quite soon.

A moment.

ABBOTT

Lewis was on furlough in December, after his father died.

HAYWARD

I see.

ABBOTT

But a "CH" has sent him a letter that is quite perplexing to me.

HAYWARD

May I take a look?

ABBOTT

Of course. I know you love romantic intrigue.

HAYWARD

You are mistaking me with Mrs. Adams.

Hayward picks up the letter. He reads. Abbott looks at him.

HAYWARD

He was a very handsome man.

ABBOTT

He was.

HAYWARD

Will you write back?

ABBOTT

Is it my place?

HAYWARD

Are you concerned about the moral question?

ABBOTT

I suppose.

HAYWARD

Well, the truth is we don't have any information about his whereabouts. There is no body.

ABBOTT

Chase saw him fall. But that is all I know.

HAYWARD

Ah.

ABBOTT

But, yes, morally speaking. What do you think my duty is?

HAYWARD

What's the harm in sending a letter to the hospital? Saying that you have no information about Lewis, that he hasn't been seen since July 3rd.

ABBOTT

You think you know these men, after spending years with them, and then they disappear and you have merely crumbs with which to decipher their lives.

HAYWARD

Lewis appeared capable of charming whomever he wanted. In truth, he could be anywhere.

ABBOTT

I suppose he could be.

Abbott coughs for quite awhile.

ABBOTT

I will not write the letter. It is not my place. And to be honest, I never much liked Lewis. Let his mistress wonder.

HAYWARD

You should have more brandy. And get some rest.

ABBOTT

Yes. I believe I would be able to recuperate nicely, if we were anywhere other than here.

Hayward smiles at him wanly.

Cady enters, in men's clothes. A doorbell rings.

xii.

Brookline. The parlor at the Lewis house. Mrs. Lewis, Ralph's mother, sits, sipping tea, she is in full mourning clothes. We hear a door close.

Edith enters, also in mourning clothes. Cady follows close behind.

EDITH

Mother, this is Private Grey. He fought alongside Ralph in the 20th.

Mrs. Lewis looks up at Cady. She smiles, a thin-lipped smile. Cady bows her head.

CADY

It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Lewis. Both of you. I have heard so much about you from Ralph.

EDITH

Did you? What did he say?

CADY

He spoke of your beauty.

EDITH

Oh, well, he hasn't seen me in quite awhile.

MRS. LEWIS

Hush, Edith, you are still as beautiful as you were when you married.

A moment.

CADY

He told me that you were expecting a child?

EDITH

Yes, little George. Named for Ralph's father.

CADY

Is he—

EDITH

He's asleep upstairs.

CADY

He must be less than a month old?

EDITH

Two months. (*a moment*) He arrived earlier than we anticipated.

MRS. LEWIS

Would you like to see him?

CADY

I wouldn't want to disturb him. I'm not really very accustomed to children.

EDITH

No. (*we see her anger towards her mother-in-law coming out*) Why would Private Grey want to meet George?

MRS LEWIS

He's the sweetest little boy. Looks just like his mother.

EDITH

He has my eyes.

MRS LEWIS

Were you at the Battle in Gettysburg?

CADY

I was not. I was in the hospital in Washington over the summer.

EDITH

But you're doing better?

CADY

I am, thank you.

MRS LEWIS

Do you have any news about Ralph for us?

CADY

I do not. I came in hopes that you had news. He was a very good friend.

EDITH

We are very much in the dark. And have been since July. You hear these stories or see these photographs and hope that he wasn't thrown into a pit with other men with dirt piled up on top of him.

MRS. LEWIS

We did hear from Commander Abbott, but only to say that they had no news about Ralph. A fellow soldier, a man named Chase, saw him hit, but then he was never seen again.

EDITH

Are you on furlough now, Private Grey? How is it that you are not with the regiment in Virginia?

A moment.

CADY

I have taken a position with Doctor Hayward, he is the Brigade Surgeon. He has allowed me to take a brief furlough. I am returning to Nantucket for a week before returning to front.

EDITH

Are you from Nantucket?

CADY

I am.

EDITH

How delightful. It must be beautiful this time of year, with the leaves. Are there trees in Nantucket?

CADY

There are.

EDITH

Goodness. I've always wanted to go to Nantucket. Mother, we should go next summer. If the war is over. Breathe in that salty air.

MRS LEWIS

Yes. That would be quite an excursion.

EDITH

The war will be over next summer, won't it?

CADY

I do hope so, but I am very far away from any of the fighting now.

EDITH

I don't understand why the Southrons don't just give up.

CADY

The Southrons are as stubborn as we are.

EDITH

But then if they don't want to be part of the Union, why don't we allow them to leave?

CADY

We are fighting against the tyranny of slavery, among other things. If we allow the Confederate States to secede then we allow slavery to continue. And we allow all the men who have died for the Union cause to die in vain.

EDITH

But couldn't that happen til kingdom come?

CADY

I suppose it could.

EDITH

Pardon my saying so, but women know better than to engage in war. And then we have to sit by silently while we watch our men kill one another. It hardly seems to make sense.

CADY

If you were at war, I believe you would come to that conclusion even more, Mrs. Lewis. Ralph and I spoke of it often.

EDITH

Do you think he is dead, Private Grey? Or do you believe that he somehow managed to desert?

CADY

I do not know.

EDITH

They shoot the deserters, don't they?

CADY

If they can catch them.

EDITH

And he couldn't return here, they would see him, they would know.

CADY

I suppose that's right.

EDITH

So where would he go?

CADY

I do not know.

Cady has a moment of realization, it is small and subtle, but all of a sudden she thinks there's hope that Ralph is still alive.

EDITH

I dreamt last night that he came home. And then here you are today.

MRS LEWIS

Do you have a sweetheart back in Nantucket, Private Grey?

CADY

I do not.

MRS LEWIS

I'm sure your parents will be happy to see you.

CADY

My parents are no longer alive.

MRS LEWIS

Oh, I'm so sorry.

CADY

I was very young when they passed.

George cries offstage.

MRS LEWIS

The prince awakes.

EDITH

Will you think us terribly rude if we do not invite you to stay to dine with us?

CADY

Not at all, I wouldn't want to impose on you.

EDITH

We do not entertain much since George's arrival.

CADY

No, I'm sure it's quite a change.

EDITH

Not that we did much entertaining before his arrival. There being a war on.

CADY

Yes.

George cries again.

EDITH

I should tend to the prince. Mother, will you show Private Grey out?

CADY

I will show myself out. No need to get up.

MRS LEWIS

God bless you, young man.

CADY

Thank you.

EDITH

Goodbye. Pleasure to meet a friend of Ralph's.

Edith exits.

MRS LEWIS

I will pray for you. As I pray for Ralph.

She extends her hand to Cady. Cady takes it. They look at each other. George cries again.

MRS LEWIS

New life. And us in mourning clothes.

CADY

It must be nice. To have a reminder of him in the house.

MRS LEWIS

Yes.

CADY

Take care.

She makes to leave. She stops.

CADY

Oh, I meant to leave you my address in Nantucket. Should you want to visit. After the war.

She hands a card to Mrs. Lewis.

She leaves.

Mrs. Lewis looks after her.

xiii.

Nantucket. Cady stands on the beach at Brant Point, looking out at the sea.

Mrs. Macy enters.

MRS. MACY

Mrs. Coffin said you were back. I couldn't believe it.

CADY

I can hardly believe it myself.

MRS. MACY

Have you been in Boston this whole time?

CADY

No. I went to Washington. I worked in a hospital there.

MRS. MACY

Oh!

CADY

But it got to be too hard. Too many dying men. They reminded me of Ezra.

MRS. MACY

Yes.

CADY

I wanted to be back at the house. I missed the Grey Lady.

MRS. MACY

We missed you. We worried for months. And then we decided you must have found work in Boston. But if you run off again, you should write.

CADY

I don't think I will run off again. I'm back now.

MRS. MACY

Good.

The chorus of women come on stage.

They slowly dress Cady in full mourning clothes.

After a moment, she joins the chorus.

CHORUS

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads— you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not to late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose hold
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek to find and not to yield.²⁴

A letter slowly floats to the ground, the chorus looks at it, expectantly.

Before it reaches the ground, black out.

The sound of a steamer arriving in port.

End of play.

²⁴ Tennyson, *Ulysses*

HITHER DITCH

A farce

Cast of Characters

Captain Bertie Bird- an old 26, amateur theater director
Henrietta George- an old 22, bluestocking and nurse
Lieutenant Hector Andrews- 24, graduate of Rugby and Cambridge
Sergeant Norman Bilks- 40, veteran of the Boer War
Private Frederick Fletcher- 20s, the fool

Setting

September 1916.

A trench near Guillemont during the The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (Battle of the Somme).

A note on staging

It might be fun to stage this in the traverse, with audience on either side of the trench, looking down on the action. The trench should have an entrance from Bird's rooms—in the form of a canvas tarp. There's also a ladder that leads to No Man's Land. Otherwise entrances and exits come from along the trench. Trenches are pretty narrow. Have fun with that.

Dawn. A trench at the Battle of the Somme. Birds chirp loudly. Distant machine gun fire breaks up the bird chirps.

A rustling noise, followed by a heavy thump. It sounds otherworldly.

The sound of a kettle whistling. This also sounds otherworldly, but recognizable. Particularly once...

A moment later, Captain Bertie Bird enters from a doorway covered by a piece of canvas. He holds a tin mug full of tea. He breathes in deeply through his nose, exhales. Bird is an old-looking 26. Balding, thin moustache, baggy uniform. He wears a poncey scarf around his neck that is not protocol.

BIRD

Today's the day.

He blows on his tea to cool it down.

Frederick Flatcher enters through the doorway with a tin mug of tea. Flatcher in his mid-20s. He's slightly overweight. He's not very bright, but he's very loyal.

BIRD

You see that over there?

FLATCHER

What, sir?

BIRD

The steam rising over there.

FLATCHER

On the other side of No Man's Land?

BIRD

Yes, Flatcher.

FLATCHER

(he thinks he sees the steam)

Yes?

BIRD

What do you think they're doing over there?

FLATCHER

Drinking tea?

BIRD

The Huns don't drink tea.

FLATCHER

They don't?

BIRD

They drink ale.

FLATCHER

For breakfast?

BIRD

Yes. I believe they do.

FLATCHER

Could we drink ale for breakfast?

BIRD

No. We don't have any ale.

FLATCHER

Whiskey?

BIRD

For breakfast?

FLATCHER

If the Huns are drinking ale for breakfast, then we might beat them if we drank whiskey.

BIRD

We might. We might also not be able to stand straight when we went over the top.

FLATCHER

Are we going over the top?

Bird looks at him.

BIRD

Yes. Eventually.

FLATCHER

Will we die?

BIRD

Yes. Eventually.

FLATCHER

I'm not looking forward to that.

BIRD

No. Nor am I.

FLATCHER

Are they going to go over the top?

BIRD

I imagine so.

FLATCHER

If we go over the top and they go over the top at the same time, will it cancel everything out?

BIRD

No. That's not how it works.

FLATCHER

I'm nervous.

BIRD

You have nothing to be nervous about.

FLATCHER

You aren't nervous?

BIRD

No, I am. But you have nothing to be nervous about.

FLATCHER

You think I'll be fine?

BIRD

I think you'll be perfectly fine. It's me I'm worried about. Torn apart to shreds.

FLATCHER

Sir, I'm sure you won't be torn apart to shreds.

BIRD

That's very kind of you to say, but it's entirely within the realm of possibility.

FLATCHER

Not if I can help it.

BIRD

There isn't much you can do, Fletcher.

FLATCHER

I will do my best. I always endeavor to do my best.

BIRD

Good. That's good.

Norman Bilks enters, jogging in as we hear a spray of machine gun fire. Bilks is in his 40s, greying hair, distinguished and kind looking.

BILKS

Crikey. A bit early for machine guns, you'd think.

BIRD

You'd think.

FLATCHER

Morning, Sergeant Bilks.

BILKS

Good morning Fletcher. Captain Bird.

BIRD

How are you feeling today, Bilks?

BILKS

I'm alright. A little stiff in the old joints, but nothing a little tea and calisthenics won't fix.

BIRD

Good. And are you ready for tonight?

BILKS

Am I ever!

BIRD

Splendid.

FLATCHER

Bertie's worried he's going to be torn apart to shreds.

BILKS

That's not a very positive attitude.

BIRD

Flatcher, I said that to you in confidence.

FLATCHER

I know, you were very confident when you said it. That's why I repeated it.

BIRD

I don't think I'm going to be torn apart to shreds.

BILKS

If you think that about yourself, then what's to become of us?

BIRD

I'm sure it'll all be quite fine.

BILKS

I was feeling very confident when I came over here.

BIRD

Oh goodness, I'm sorry. I didn't—Flatcher should have kept his trap shut. Per usual!

FLATCHER

I'm sorry, sir.

BILKS

I was rehearsing 'til the wee hours last night. Was up anyway with all that sniping.

BIRD

That's good.

BILKS

Want to be prepared. I'd hate to go up there and feel completely exposed.

BIRD

Of course.

BILKS

To be honest, I couldn't sleep on account of nerves as well. Sniping and nerves.

BIRD

I haven't slept for a week.

FLATCHER

I've been sleeping like a rock.

BILKS

Well, you have less to be nervous about.

FLATCHER

I beg your pardon. I am as much a part of this mission as the rest of you.

BIRD

Well, not entirely.

BILKS

You're not really putting yourself on the line in the same way.

FLATCHER

I am doing the part I was assigned.

BIRD

Yes, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have qualified your contribution.

BILKS

We're bound to get a little pre-show jitters, right? Makes us a little punchy.

BIRD

Quite right, completely natural.

Bilks stares off towards the German trench, but really into middle distance.

BILKS

Do you think it'll go over, sir?

BIRD

I rather hope so.

BILKS

Yes, me too. I'm not really one for failure.

BERTIE

Who is?

BILKS

No, of course, merely stating the obvious.

Lieutenant Hector Andrews enters, whistling. He's handsome, posh and a little insufferable looking, in his mid 20s. He went to Rugby and Cambridge and was raised in India—most likely has an Indian mother.

ANDREWS

Good morning, men.

BIRD

Good morning Lieutenant.

ANDREWS

Beautiful morning, isn't it?

BILKS

It's not bad.

ANDREWS

The red-yellow fingers of dawn etching across the barren trees.

FLATCHER

Oh, did someone forget to clean up Donald Arrington's body last night? I thought Private Khan was going to do it, but he doesn't always listen to me when I talk to him. I think my accent confuses him.

ANDREWS

No. Not Lance Corporal Arrington's fingers. *Dawn's* fingers.

FLATCHER

I thought Lance Corporal Arrington's Christian name was Don, sir?

ANDREWS

It was.

FLATCHER

And are his fingers still in No Man's Land, sir?

Andrews climbs up the ladder and peeks his head up over the trench.

ANDREWS

No.

Machine gun fire. Everyone ducks.

ANDREWS

His body appears to have been removed.

FLATCHER

Wonderful. I wonder whose fingers it was you did see, sir.

Andrews looks at Bird and Bilks. They shrug at him.

ANDREWS

I do not know, Flatcher. Could have been anyone's, I suppose.

FLATCHER

Quite right. Nasty war.

BILKS

Much nastier than South Africa.

ANDREWS

(he's heard this before)

Yes, Bilks.

BILKS

Man is not made to fight in a trench. To shoot from a crouch for days and weeks and months on end. Man is made to run and duck and parry and advance.

BIRD

Has anyone seen Percy this morning?

ANDREWS

Not I.

BIRD

He knew we were called for sun up?

FLATCHER

I told him so on Wednesday, sir.

BIRD

And Henry?

BILKS

Always takes Henry a little longer in the morning.

BIRD

Yes. Of course.

BILKS

Should be here soon though.

BIRD

I know it's difficult to get here right at dawn, but I do wish Henry would try a little harder.

FLATCHER

Coming all the way from the CCS, sir, takes a bit of time. And you never know when someone's croaked.

BIRD

Well. Next time we do a show, the cast will be strictly comprised of soldiers.

ANDREWS

Oh, what will the next show be?

BIRD

I have some thoughts, but I'm waiting to see how this one goes. *Henry V* seems a little...

ANDREWS

Obvious.

BIRD

Yes. And really we don't have enough actors for Shakespeare, unfortunately.

BILKS

There are enough men for Shakespeare.

BIRD

Yes, Bilks, but not all men are actors. As you, of course, know.

FLATCHER

And not all actors are men!

BIRD

Yes.

BILKS

(to Andrews)

I was telling the others I was practicing my lines all night.

ANDREWS

Good. You weren't off book last time.

BILKS

It's been a difficult week. We lost Harrison and Yarbrough on subsequent days. But I know all my lines now!

ANDREWS

Should we test you?

BILKS

Yes. Give me a line. Any line!

Andrews looks at Bird.

BIRD

(acting)

“Father, it’s me! Don’t you recognize your own son?”

BILKS

(acting)

“My son? You couldn’t possibly be my son. My son was vibrant-looking, youthful, in the prime of all things.”

BIRD

(acting)

“But it is me. Your very own Willy!”

Flatcher snorts a little. Bird and Bilks look over.

BIRD

Yes, Flatcher?

FLATCHER

It’s funny, sir.

BIRD

It’s the emotional crescendo of the play, Flatcher. The audience shouldn’t be laughing.

FLATCHER

Maybe not, but whenever Percy says, “Your very own Willy!” in his posho accent, I can’t keep the laughter in, I’m afraid.

BIRD

Very well. But for tonight’s performance, when you are backstage, I expect absolute silence from you. Do you understand?

FLATCHER

Yes, sir.

BILKS

I hope I can stay awake for tonight.

FLATCHER

I could put the kettle back on. Anyone like a top-up?

ANDREWS

I would love a tea, yes, thank you Fletcher. But please no sugar for me.

FLATCHER

No sugar?!

ANDREWS

No sugar.

FLATCHER

It's just unnatural.

ANDREWS

Perhaps.

FLATCHER

Who else?

BILKS

I'll take one. One teaspoon of sugar, please.

Fletcher looks at Bird.

BIRD

I'm alright, ta.

Fletcher exits back through the curtain.

ANDREWS

I saw a rat in a bag of sugar at Wipers.²⁵ Haven't touched the stuff since.

BILKS

There are rats everywhere—

ANDREWS

I know.

BILKS

—Crawling on your boots at night. Nibbling at your tunic during the day. In South Africa, we saw rats the size of a housecat.

ANDREWS

A house cat! Bird, do you think we would be happier if we had a cat with us. Here at the front.

²⁵ The Battle of Ypres

BIRD

A cat?

ANDREWS

Next time we go into town, let's seduce a nice French woman and borrow her pussycat.

BIRD

Borrow?

ANDREWS

We'll return it.

BIRD

What if it gets hit by a shell?

ANDREWS

I'd protect it with my life.

BILKS

Do you think they make gas masks small enough for cats?

ANDREWS

Think of the morale boost. A pussycat in the trenches with us.

BIRD

I suppose.

ANDREWS

As a boy in Inja, I had the sweetest pussycat. She was orange and long haired and we named her Marigold. When I left her behind to go to school I was devastated. I wrote letters home not to my mother or father, but to Marigold. She didn't respond.

BIRD

She was a cat.

ANDREWS

But occasionally a cat hair would make it into one of mother's letters. And I would treasure it more than anything else.

BILKS

What a sad story.

ANDREWS

It's not sad. I loved that cat.

BILKS

Is she dead?

ANDREWS

Oh goodness yes. Eaten by a tiger roaming the streets. It leapt into our garden and tore her apart.

BILKS

A tiger?

ANDREWS

Mauled a few of our servants as well, poor things. A very trying day for Father.

BIRD

I'm sure.

Henrietta George enters in a rush. She wears a men's trench coat²⁶ and a cap. She looks like she's been crying. When she speaks she has a trans-Atlantic accent.

BIRD

Henry!

HENRY

I'm sorry I'm late—

BILKS

Flatcher's making tea if you want some.

HENRY

No thank you.

They look at her.

HENRY

I have terrible news.

She begins to sob.

ANDREWS

What is it?

HENRY

Percy.

²⁶ These weren't de rigeur until 1917, but Henrietta probably acquired hers in London when she was a nurse.

ANDREWS

Where is that old so-and-so? He of all people knows he can't be late for our final rehearsal.

BILKS

He was Hamlet at Harrow?

ANDREWS

Iago at Eton. I think.

BILKS

Romeo at Rugby.

ANDREWS

I was Romeo at Rugby—

HENRY

—Percy's dead.

Bird drops his tin mug. Tea spills everywhere.

BILKS

Oh no...

HENRY

Just now. He came in last night shot through the stomach. The doctor tried, but there was nothing to be done. Intestine everywhere. Jagged innards. No way to stitch him up. Just let him die comfortable. As comfortable as possible.

ANDREWS

Goodness.

A moment of silence. Broken up by machine gun fire

BIRD

Where was he?

HENRY

In the CCS.

BIRD

Where was he when he was shot?

HENRY

Fixing some barbed wire up near that oak tree. Preparing the trench for the regiment coming in tonight.

BIRD

On whose orders?

HENRY

His own, most likely.

BIRD

Stubborn to the end.

ANDREWS

I suppose we'll have to cancel the play.

BIRD

Cancel?

ANDREWS

With Percy out, how can we do the play?

BIRD

We employ the great theatrical tradition of understudies.

ANDREWS

But who will be his understudy? No one else knows the play!

Bird is about to say something. Fletcher enters with a tray of tea.

FLATCHER

Tea's ready.

He notices Henry.

FLATCHER

Henry, did you want one?

Henry shakes her head, sadly.

FLATCHER

Cripes, who died?

BILKS

Percy.

Fletcher drops the tea. He begins to cry. Bilks pats him on the shoulder.

FLATCHER

The tea!!

HENRY

We can make more.

FLATCHER

I used the last tin of milk.

ANDREWS

Oh dear.

HENRY

Oh, I nicked one from the CCS. I thought you might be running low.

*Henry takes a tin of condensed milk out of her trench coat. Holds it out to Fletcher.
Fletcher hugs Henry.*

FLATCHER

Bless.

He releases Henry.

FLATCHER

I'll go make another pot of tea. I'm sorry I dropped the tea. I'm just so shocked. Lieutenant Farewell and me weren't very close. But I never thought, of any of us, that he'd be the one to go.

BIRD

No. It's terribly inconvenient. And sad. Tragic, really.

Fletcher hangs his head. He picks the mugs up from the ground. He goes back through the curtain.

BILKS

Fletcher knows the play.

BIRD

He does.

ANDREWS

You think Fletcher should play Lieutenant Gordon?

BILKS

Who else can do it?

Flatcher reenters with a rag, he begins mopping up the spilt tea, but the rag just gets really really muddy.

BILKS

Flatcher?

FLATCHER

Yes, Bilks?

BILKS

How well would you say you know the play?

FLATCHER

Which play?

BILKS

Our play.

FLATCHER

Felix's play?

BILKS

Yes.

FLATCHER

Well enough I should think. I've been at all the rehearsals, haven't I?

BIRD

What Bilks is trying to ask is whether or not you think you could play the role of Gordon for tonight's performance at Headquarters.

FLATCHER

Me? Well, I'd certainly be honored.

BILKS

I'm sure they'd understand if he were to carry the script during the performance.

ANDREWS

Wouldn't it be most proper for us to postpone the performance?

HENRY

What do you think Percy would want?

BILKS

Surely he would want us to perform in his memory.

BIRD

And in Felix's memory.

BILKS

Yes.

ANDREWS

But how will we perform—with such adversity?

FLATCHER

I think it would be nice. I think the other men will find it inspiring.

BIRD

And you think you can do it?

FLATCHER

I'm willing to try!

ANDREWS

But then who will be backstage?

BIRD

I can help out backstage during the performance.

HENRY

But then you can't watch the show!

BIRD

Everyone of us must make sacrifices. It is the theater after all.

The kettle whistles. Fletcher gets up from mopping the muddy trench floor.

FLATCHER

I'll get that.

HENRY

I'll do it.

FLATCHER

You can't go in there!

HENRY

Why not?

FLATCHER

It's not appropriate! The officers sleep in there!

HENRY

You haven't been to a CCS, have you?

FLATCHER

Never been injured once in this war. Proud of that!

ANDREWS

Flatcher, you've never been in harm's way at all.

FLATCHER

Proud of that too! Trying to keep my noggin on my shoulders.

The kettle's still whistling. Flatcher blocks Henry from going in.

BIRD

For goodness sake, shall I go in?

FLATCHER

No, I will go.

Flatcher pushes Henry to the side unceremoniously and ducks through the canvas. The kettle stops whistling. Henry's hat is knocked off. Revealing her hair done up in braids. Henry, the audience might realize for the first time, is a woman.²⁷

ANDREWS

Pardon my saying so, but I think it's a mistake to ask Flatcher to play Gordon tonight.

BIRD

What other choice do we have?

ANDREWS

I could play Gordon.

BILKS

But you're playing Damien.

ANDREWS

Yes.

BILKS

Who will play Damien if you're playing Gordon?

²⁷ Of course it's more likely that the audience has read the program and knows that Henry is a woman.

ANDREWS

Flatcher could play Damien. Or we could rustle someone else up. It seems completely ludicrous to pin our *memorial* of Percy and Felix onto a man like Flatcher. Who, I warrant, is a charming man and quite helpful from time to time, but is in no way emotionally equipped—

(Flatcher comes out again with a tray of tea, Andrews does not see him)

—to handle the gravitas and heartbreaking pathos of Lieutenant Gordon. He just isn't clever enough.

The others look at Flatcher. Andrews turns and sees Flatcher.

FLATCHER

Who isn't clever enough, Lieutenant Andrews?

ANDREWS

(stammering)

Henry suggested that Private Ruskin could play the role, but I don't think he's appropriate for the role.

FLATCHER

Oh, no, just as you said. He doesn't have the *gravity* of Lieutenant Gordon.

BIRD

He's so light! He'll just float away.

FLATCHER

He is very light. Small man, Private Ruskin. Almost womanly.

Flatcher hands Bilks a mug.

FLATCHER

One sugar.

BILKS

Ta.

He hands a mug to Andrews.

FLATCHER

This one's yours, sir. No sugar.

Andrews nods in acceptance.

BIRD

Now that we all have our tea, are we ready to start rehearsing?

HENRY

I'm ready.

She takes her trench coat off. Revealing her nurse's outfit. The skirt has been tucked into her trousers so that she's been able to pass herself off as a soldier. Her script is tucked in the back of her trousers, as well. She untucks the skirt. And begins to take her trousers off. The men pretend not to watch as she does this.

FLATCHER

So I'm playing Lieutenant Gordon?

BIRD

Yes.

FLATCHER

Should I do the accent?

ANDREWS

Percy's accent?

BIRD

Do what makes you the most comfortable. We're really just trying to tell a story as best we can.

FLATCHER

So not the accent.

BIRD

I think to start, no accent.

FLATCHER

Alright.

Henry is now in her nurse's outfit, she has thrown her trousers onto the ladder. She throws her script on the ground next to the ladder.

BIRD

Flatcher, do you need a script?

FLATCHER

Oh, I have one. It's inside. I'll go get it, sir.

Flatcher runs to get his script. Andrews rolls his eyes.

ANDREWS

This is going to be a colossal cock-up. If you don't mind my saying so.

BILKS

I think you underestimate Frederick.

ANDREWS

I really don't think I do.

HENRY

I don't know what else we would do.

ANDREWS

We cancel the performance.

BIRD

We are not cancelling the performance. The show must go on. We are at war! We can surely deal with adversity on all fronts.

ANDREWS

It seems ill-advised to create more fronts on which to fight.

BIRD

I don't think you understood my metaphor.

ANDREWS

I think I understood your metaphor perfectly. I read English at King's, you know.

BIRD

Yes, Andrews, I am aware of your academic background. You are not stingy with it.

ANDREWS

And what is that supposed to mean?

BIRD

Lieutenant. We have promised a performance to the men at the CCS and the medical officers stationed there. We have spent 13 days in this hellish trench with very little to look forward to other than a hot bath, some pretty French women, their full-bodied casks of wine and this performance of Felix's play. When Felix died, I said, we must honor his life and his death with this play. And we all agreed. Didn't we?

Everyone nods their heads.

BIRD

And so now that Percy has died, I suggest we do the same. We honor his death and his life with this performance.

ANDREWS

But we didn't need Felix to be alive to perform his play.

HENRY

Rehearsals have been easier without him, actually.

BIRD

They have. Felix was a bit of a tyrant.

Everyone nods, again.

ANDREWS

But Percy was the lifeblood of this play.

This pisses Bird off, though he can't fully show it.

BIRD

With all due respect to the late Lieutenant Farewell, I want to remind all of you that this play belongs to all of us equally. Though Percy may have had the most lines, been in every scene, inspired Felix to write the play in the first place, we cannot lose sight of the fact that this play belongs to everyone. All of us. From Percy to *me* to Fletcher.

As if on cue, Fletcher enters with his script. It is mangled, covered in tea stains.

FLATCHER

Found it!

He waves it around proudly.

BIRD

Wonderful, Fletcher.

Andrews glares at him.

BIRD

Let's take our places for the top of act one, scene one.

Andrews and Bilks shuffle "off." Fletcher, while carrying his mangled script, attempts to set up a table (the table is comprised of whatever is available in the trench, it's likely not a table).

BIRD

Ah, sorry, I will set up the table, don't worry about that.

Flatcher sets it down, but not where it's supposed to go. Bird struggles to move it to the proper place.

BIRD

Now you get on the table. You are on the edge of death. For the performance I will make a quick curtain speech that will go something like...

Bird stands in front of the table, presenting to an audience.

BIRD

Hello. I'm Captain Bertie Bird of the 13th London. For the past two weeks this company of actors has braved every adversity thrown their way to create this piece of theater for you. Despite the loss of two company members—our beloved playwright Felix MacAllister and lead actor Lieutenant Percy Farewell—we are proud to perform for you tonight *A Blighty Wound* by Felix MacAllister. Stepping in for the late Lieutenant Farewell will be Private Frederick Flatcher.

And then I'll scurry off backstage. And the metaphorical curtain will rise.

Bird scurries off to the side. Henry comes to the side of the table.

HENRY as NURSE

Lieutenant Gordon. Can you hear me?

Flatcher looks at his script. He uses his finger to find his place in the script. He is about to say something and then realizes he doesn't actually have a line. He puts his head back down.

HENRY as NURSE

(to an unseen doctor)

Doctor? I can't see anything wrong with him, but he is unresponsive.

Flatcher again loudly looks at his script. Then put his head back down.

BIRD

I'm going to stop you for a moment.

Henry looks at Bird. Flatcher stays on his back.

ANDREWS

(aside to Bilks)

This is going to be interminable, isn't it?

BILKS

(aside to Andrews)

Be nice, Andrews.

BIRD

Flatcher?

FLATCHER

Yes?

BIRD

This whole first scene is performed by Henry. You will not move until she leaves. You are dying. You are breathing slowly, shallowly. Can you do that?

FLATCHER

Yes.

BIRD

You don't need to look at the script until Henry leaves. Alright?

FLATCHER

Yes, sir. Thank you.

BIRD

Henry let's start from "I can't see anything wrong with him..."

HENRY

Alright.

Flatcher puts his script on his chest.

HENRY as NURSE

I can't see anything wrong with him, but he is unresponsive.

She leans over him.

HENRY as NURSE

Oh Willy. What has happened to you? Yesterday you were so full of life. And now? You are cold. Unresponsive. Do you remember how you kissed my hand and called me your daffodil? I remember. I will always remember.

She begins to exit.

I will always remember you, Willy Gordon.

She “exits,” joining Bilks and Andrews. She smiles at Andrews. He scowls at her a little. Her smile fades.

Flatcher has not moved.

Bird gestures to him. He does not see it.

BIRD

Flatcher. Henry has exited.

FLATCHER

Has she?

BIRD

Yes.

FLATCHER

You see, I had my eyes closed, so I didn’t know.

BIRD

Yes, well, you can keep your eyes open a little. So that you can see when she’s gone. You could also gauge from the silence that she had gone. Or even, perhaps, sense that her presence, her essence, has departed from your side.

Bird’s a little in love with Henry, isn’t he?

FLATCHER

Yes, ok. Can we do that bit again?

BIRD

Henry, could you come do that last line for him, so he can hear you?

HENRY

Yes.

She comes back to Flatcher’s side.

HENRY as NURSE

I will always remember you, Willy Gordon.

She exits.

Flatcher looks at his script. Again, using his finger to find his place in the script. He sits up abruptly.

FLATCHER as WILLY

(reading quickly)

I remember the way the tea kettle used to whistle at our house in Devon. The way that steam would rise from my cup on a cold morning. I would walk to the cliffs overlooking the sea and think that I wanted to be anywhere but there. I wanted to see the world. I wanted adventure. I wanted romance and madness. I imagined the whistle of the kettle was like the whistle of a ship, calling to me.

But madness and romance and adventure were not for me. Not as far as mother and father were concerned. I was to be educated. I was to be scholarly. I was to go to Cambridge. And so I did. I was to work in a bank. And so I did.

And then when war broke out, there was no one to stop me. In fact, it was heartily encouraged. So madness and adventure and possibly even romance would come for me after all. War is all these things and yet we hate it. It is none of these things and yet we fight it.

I've been hit, but I don't know where and I don't remember how. Perhaps it doesn't matter.

But listen. The whistle of a tea kettle. It beckons.

Willy stands.

Bird puts his head in his hands.

BIRD

You don't need to read that part. You can just stand.

FLATCHER

Alright.

Flatcher stands.

BIRD

And then we're quickly whisked away to Devon. Bilks you can enter here. Flatcher, you don't need to move.

Bilks comes on. He assumes the role of Willy's father.

BIRD

So, remember, you're sitting at home, reading. And your son comes to visit. Your son who should be at the front. You're surprised, you're excited, and you're confused.

BILKS

Right.

BIRD

Flatcher? You're happy to be home, but confused how you got there. Remember, no one understands the rules of this play yet.

FLATCHER

I thought you understood them, sir.

BIRD

I understand them. I meant that the *audience* doesn't know them yet. And Willy doesn't know them. We (and by we I mean the audience) will understand the rules slowly, as the play develops, as Willy visits more people.

ANDREWS

We understand how it works, Captain.

BIRD

I would like for everyone to be on the same page.

FLATCHER

I'm on the second page. Is that correct?

BIRD

This scene is on the third page.

FLATCHER

Glad I asked.

He flips the page. Bilks sits

FLATCHER

Yes, here we are.

BIRD

And.... Begin!

BILKS

Am I meant to have a chair for this scene?

BIRD

You are. That is my job now. I will make sure that you have one at Headquarters. In the meantime, use... *(he searches around the trench looking for a chair-like thing)* this sandbag?

Bird heaves the sandbag over to Bilks. Bilks collapses into the sandbag.

BIRD

Sorry. I could get a chair from inside.

BILKS

This is fine.

BIRD

Tonight, I'll do this.

BILKS

Flatcher, if you could stand a little farther away from me when you first come in and then slowly move towards me, it might help the audience understand that you and I have had a strained relationship.

Bird looks at him like "who's directing this, you or me?"

FLATCHER

Move slowly. Strained relationship. Ok.

BIRD

And... Begin!

Flatcher moves verrrrrry slowwwwwwwly towards Bilks as he speaks the following to Bilks.

FLATCHER as WILLY

Who is this man I see before me? He looks so like my father. But I know that I cannot be at home for I haven't received leave.

BIRD

Flatcher, you can say that to the audience. Or to yourself. Remember, it's all a dream.

FLATCHER

What is?

BIRD

The play.

FLATCHER

It is?

Bird, for the first time, sighs heavily. Takes a moment. Flatcher and Bilks look at him.

In the silence, Henry turns to Andrews.

HENRY

It's unbearable, isn't it?

ANDREWS

It is.

HENRY

I never thought I could feel this empty.

ANDREWS

It's just a play.

BIRD

What I believe Felix was trying to accomplish with the play was exploring the internal and mental state of a man about to die.

FLATCHER

Really?

HENRY

Oh. I... I was talking about Percy. About all of it.

ANDREWS

Oh. Yes. I was not talking about Percy. It's a shame about Percy. You were quite fond of him?

HENRY

He was so kind to me.

ANDREWS

Yes.

BIRD

Yes.

BILKS

Did Felix ever say that explicitly?

BIRD

I don't think he needed to. It's very clear from the text.

HENRY

Did you know him before the war?

ANDREWS

I didn't. He was older. He was good friends with Cedric Dickens.²⁸ They were both at Trinity.

HENRY

Major Dickens died.

ANDREWS

Did he?

BILKS

I don't agree with your interpretation of the text.

HENRY

Yes, a week ago.

ANDREWS

Goodness. What a terrible tragedy.

HENRY

Did you like Dickens?

ANDREWS

I didn't know him either. I knew of him of course. Never studied his grandfather. God forbid we read popular fiction at Cambridge. But I have read all his books.

HENRY

All of them! Do you have a favorite?

ANDREWS

I don't.

HENRY

I like *A Tale of Two Cities* best, I think.

ANDREWS

Oh yes, that's a good one.

HENRY

I always found it very inspirational.

ANDREWS

Did it inspire you to come to the front?

²⁸ Andrews like to name drop.

HENRY

Perhaps.

They look at each other. A moment. Bird notices.

BIRD

You two. Stop making love to one another and weigh in on this conversation, please.

Henry and Andrews straighten up.

HENRY

We were NOT making love to one another, Captain.

ANDREWS

Very much on the contrary!

BIRD

Yes, yes. Whatever it was you were doing—

HENRY

We were talking about Dickens.

BIRD

—Please stop. This is important.

Henry and Andrews walk over to where Bird, Bilks and Fletcher are.

BIRD

There's a bit of a question about Felix's intention of the play. Bilks and I seem to disagree. And since Felix is not here to defend his play—

Henry lets out a loud snort-sob.

BIRD

—I thought I would open it up to the two of you. I believe that the play is a dream. Bilks doesn't think it is. Andrews, you read English at Kings. What do you think?

ANDREWS

I think Felix is exploring the Freudian world of dreams and family, while also using the familiar literary trope of midsummer trickery. Note that the play is set in July, when the days are long and the nights are short and all sorts of things can happen. This is standard in Scandinavian literature, Shakespeare, a whole host of plays, poems, novels, etc, use this device as a way of exploring the "what if?" the "unknown" the supernatural. I've always believed that Felix is marrying the afterworld and the mystical world to ask the universal question "Who am I and what will I become?"

BILKS

What does that mean?

BIRD

It means it's a dream.

ANDREWS

Simply speaking, I suppose you could say that.

BILKS

So how does this affect how I play the role of the Father? This would have been helpful to have known *before* today.

BIRD

I think you can still play the Father the way that you've been playing him. He's not a dream to Willy. If anything, I think that it's more for Fletcher to be aware of than you.

BILKS

Alright.

BIRD

Shall we take it from the top.

HENRY

What about what I think?

BIRD

I'm sorry Henry. I thought that the matter was settled. What was it you wanted to add?

HENRY

Only that, as a nurse, I see this kind of behavior quite frequently. The way nerves affect these soldiers is quite stunning. The way that their injuries—injuries that aren't even head wounds, tend to affect the way they think and feel much more than one might expect. So I wonder if it's perhaps too easy to say that the play exists in a Freudian dreamscape and more accurate to say that it all takes place in Gordon's nervous system.

BIRD

Thank you Henry.

HENRY

When I was caring for German prisoners of war they would cry out the strangest things in the middle of the night. And then the next morning they would be dead.

No one knows how to respond to this. We hear machine gun fire in the distance.

BIRD

Now! Armed with the knowledge that this play takes place in a sort of otherworldly, Midsummer mystical dreamscape that resembles, in a non-literary sense, Gordon's nervous system... let us begin with scene two.

Flatcher's brain looks like it's about to explode. Henry and Andrews go back to their side of the trench. Bilks takes his mark for the scene.

Bird gestures to Flatcher.

Flatcher enters.

FLATCHER

(reading and speaking to the audience)

Who is this man I see before me? He looks so like my father. But I know that I cannot be at home for I haven't received leave.

Flatcher moves very slowly towards Bilks.

Bilks looks up. He sees Flatcher. He looks uncomfortable with this new direction his character appears to be taking.

BILKS as FATHER

Who's there?

FLATCHER as WILLY

Father, it's me! Don't you recognize your own son?

BILKS as FATHER

My son? You couldn't possibly be my son. My son was vibrant-looking, youthful, in the prime of all things.

FLATCHER as WILLY

But it is me. Your very own Willy!

Bilks reaches out to touch Flatcher, he makes as if his hand goes through Flatcher's body.

HENRY

(whispering, commenting on this odd choice)

Oh goodness.

ANDREWS

(whispering)

Hmm.

BILKS as FATHER

Willy?! It is you. Goodness how the war has changed you.

FLATCHER as WILLY

The war has changed me. I am braver. I am resolute. (*he mispronounces resolute*) I have missed you and mother. Where is she?

BILKS as FATHER

Your mother has gone down to volunteer for the war effort. She is knitting socks, she is preparing bandages. I have never seen your mother so patriotic, so full of love for dear Britannia and for you.

FLATCHER as WILLY

I hoped I would see her.

BILKS as FATHER

I will tell her you visited.

FLATCHER as WILLY

I can stay longer. I can stay until she returns.

BILKS as FATHER

I don't know that you can.

A shift.

BILKS

Ah, I see. In this dream world, I'm dream father and I know it's a dream, but I also am acting like his real father. I'm sorry for the confusion earlier. It all makes sense now.

BIRD

Marvelous.

Machine gun fire, close by.

Flatcher looks at Bird.

BIRD

Continue with the scene.

FLATCHER as WILLY

Are you proud of me?

BILKS as FATHER

You have performed your duty, Willy. I would expect nothing less of you.

FLATCHER as WILLY

And if I die?

BILKS as FATHER

Quite.

FLATCHER

Can I ask a question?

BIRD

Yes, Fletcher.

FLATCHER

What does all that mean?

BIRD

It's very stiff upper lip. Unemotional. Willy's father does love him, but he's never shown him that love before. And even now, as Willy dreams before his death, he cannot receive the love from his father that he always craved.

FLATCHER

Blimey.

BIRD

It's very tragic.

FLATCHER

Poor Felix. Do you think his parents didn't love him, sir?

BIRD

Felix, like many of us, had a complicated relationship with his parents that both transcended and upheld British reserve.

FLATCHER

My parents are dead. So I don't know anything about that.

BIRD

Yes.

BILKS

Bird, when I say "quite" do you think I'm on the verge of tears? Do you think that there's a crack to my stiff upper lip? Perhaps this is more a question for Fletcher, since he's playing Willy. (*he turns to Fletcher*) Do you think that Willy believes that his father is somewhat emotionally affected by this moment?

FLATCHER

Yes.

BILKS

Wonderful. I will try to muster up some tears tonight. An exciting challenge!

BIRD

Yes. Now, Bilks, you will exit and Flatcher you will remain. Henry, if you recall from Wednesday's rehearsal, you will enter here and you will be the nurse for a moment from just next to the bed, but Flatcher you will not be in the bed. You will stay where you are and then Hector will come to you for the next scene.

Everyone nods. The sound of a large shell exploding. Some shrapnel falls, but doesn't hit anyone.

BIRD

Is everyone alright?

HENRY

Yes, all fine.

FLATCHER

What?

BIRD

Have you been hit at all?

FLATCHER

No sir.

BIRD

Henry (*he gestures to Henry to move a little to the left, she does so*). Perfection. Flatcher a little to the right. (*he moves to the left*) Other way. (*Flatcher moves to the right*) Good. And begin.

HENRY as NURSE

My daffodil. You called me your daffodil. Because I'm Welsh.

Andrews stifles a laugh. Bird shoots a look at him. Henry tries to keep herself from laughing. But she can't.

HENRY

Sorry. I...

BIRD

And you go off and Andrews enters.

HENRY

I have another line.

BIRD

Give me the line and then Andrews will enter.

HENRY as NURSE

You kissed my hands. And your lips were so cold.

Henry exits. Andrews enters, he holds his tin mug.

He sees Fletcher and salutes. Andrews, compared to the rest of them, is a good actor. He's natural, he's charismatic. It makes Fletcher look even worse.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

Gordon old boy. How the devil are you?

Fletcher looks totally out of his depth.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

What a pleasant surprise to see you here, I thought you were at the Somme. Dreadful news coming from the Somme from what I hear. You're lucky to be out of it. You look like you could use a stiff drink. I presume you still drink whisky.

Fletcher nods his head.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

I'll make it a double.

Andrews mimes pouring Fletcher a drink.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

Chin, chin!

Andrews drinks. Fletcher just stares at him.

BIRD

Fletcher, I believe you have a line in there somewhere.

Fletcher looks at his script.

FLATCHER

Sorry, sir.

BIRD

Andrews, if you could scale it back a touch.

ANDREWS

Scale what back?

BIRD

The charm?

ANDREWS

Impossible.

Henry giggles. Bird pretends to ignore it.

BIRD

Flatcher from your line after "Chin chin"

Flatcher is still looking at his script. Andrews peers over and points to where they are.

FLATCHER

Ta.

FLATCHER as WILLY

Damien. You look the same as ever.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

Do I? I hoped I looked more worldly. More regal.

FLATCHER as WILLY

You were always both, Damien. You know that.

ANDREWS

Can I just...

BIRD

What?

ANDREWS

I had been using this line as the indication that Damien was overly charming. And that particularly in this midsummer mystical dream setting, he would come across as even more charming. So I take some issue with being told to "scale back" as it were.

BIRD

Yes. Alright.

Bird gestures to Andrews to come closer. Andrews does so.

BIRD

(to Andrews, out of earshot of the others)

With Percy as your sparring partner, your charm was perfect. With Fletcher it doesn't quite work the same way, unfortunately. Sometimes, we have to work with what we're got.

ANDREWS

That's the story of this whole war.

BIRD

Yes, quite right. Theater as war! I shall bring that metaphor back with me to the London stage.

ANDREWS

I hear the London stage needs more metaphors.

BIRD

(ignoring him)

Let's take it from "You always were both, Damien"

Andrews gets back into his spot.

FLATCHER as WILLY

You were always both, Damien. You know that.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

How is France?

FLATCHER as WILLY

Tres bien.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

The women?

FLATCHER as WILLY

The women are beautiful.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

How is your Laurel?

FLATCHER as WILLY

We hope to marry when I next have my leave.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

When will that be?

FLATCHER as WILLY

I do not know.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

We should correspond more. I fear I have been remiss in not sending you letters.

FLATCHER as WILLY

I would very much like that.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

You were my greatest friend in school. And yet something about this war makes it difficult to put pen to paper when I need to the most. I am content to write to Eliza, but she only wants assurance that I am still alive and that I love only her. You. I could write to you about a great many things that would frighten poor Eliza.

FLATCHER as WILLY

I write everything to Laurel. Except one thing. Can you keep a secret?

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

Of course.

FLATCHER

I can't make out what this says.

He thrusts his script in Andrews' face.

ANDREWS

Captain. I'm sorry, but I can't perform this play *tonight* with Fletcher in Percy's role. It is entirely too much.

BIRD

Let's take five everyone. Andrews, let's discuss over here, shall we?

ANDREWS

I'm happy to discuss wherever, Captain.

Henry tries to subtly listen in. Bilks goes over to Fletcher.

BILKS

I think you're doing an admirable job, Fletcher.

FLATCHER

It's hard, isn't it? Acting!

BILKS

It is not as easy as it sometimes looks, no.

ANDREWS

Listen, if we were performing a light comedy with some bed tricks and a double wedding, I'd be more than happy to do my part. Go out on the stage, entertain the M.O.s and mourn Percy in the morning. But surely you see the irony of performing a play about a man who is on his death bed when the man who previously played the part has just died. Mere hours before we perform.

BIRD

Let's not forget Felix.

ANDREWS

Precisely! The playwright is also dead. How are we expected to do a good show when everyone around us is dead?

BIRD

How indeed.

Andrews looks at Bird, expecting more. Bird doesn't give him more. He merely walks away, through the canvas doorway. Andrews walks over to Henry.

ANDREWS

Do you think I'm being unreasonable?

HENRY

I think we all respond to these things in our own way. I would like to honor Percy and Felix tonight.

ANDREWS

We do them no honor with Fletcher as Willy Gordon.

HENRY

Perhaps not.

ANDREWS

If I were to play Willy, perhaps it would be honoring them.

HENRY

You.

ANDREWS

Yes.

HENRY

But you're so perfect for Damien. Why would you want to play Willy?

ANDREWS

I'm not saying I want to. I'm merely saying that I could. In these circumstances.

HENRY

And who would play Damien?

ANDREWS

We get some officer to do it once we get back to HQ.

HENRY

That seems like quite a gamble.

ANDREWS

More of a gamble than Fletcher playing Willy?

HENRY

Perhaps not.

ANDREWS

If I say something about it to Captain Bird, will you back me up?

HENRY

I don't want to cause trouble.

ANDREWS

I don't believe it will cause trouble.

HENRY

Alright. But I don't want to hurt Fletcher's feelings either.

ANDREWS

I don't think Fletcher has feelings.

HENRY

Don't be cruel, Hector. It doesn't suit you.

ANDREWS

No?

HENRY

You're much more charming when you're... charming.

ANDREWS

Am I?

Henry blushes a little.

HENRY

You are.

It occurs to Andrews that he could probably bag Henry if he wanted to.

Bird returns through the canvas doorway.

BIRD

Ok, we're back from our five-minute break.

Henry and Andrews turn towards Bird.

BIRD

I have come to a conclusion that I hope will suit everyone.

ANDREWS

Oh?

BIRD

I have decided that I will play the part of Willy Gordon for the performance tonight. Fletcher, I hope this doesn't offend you.

FLATCHER

No, sir. You're the director, sir.

BIRD

Yes. And I believe that your talents will be better served backstage.

HENRY

What a splendid idea. Hector, isn't it a splendid idea?

Andrews is stuck.

ANDREWS

It does seem to tick all the boxes.

BILKS

But who will direct us, if you're in the performance?

BIRD

You don't need anyone to direct you during the performance.

BILKS

No, but—

BIRD

There will be no more discussion. I will be playing Willy. I know the play. I know the part.

HENRY

Shall we be rehearsing again from the top? Or...

BIRD

Bilks would you like to do your scene again?

Bilks looks at his pocket watch.

BILKS

I believe I'm expected to be back at my trench in a quarter hour, so I may not have time.

BIRD

Oh. Is something afoot?

BILKS

We're clearing out the trench for the next company. Purely routine.

BIRD

Fine. You may leave now, if you'd like. We'll see you tonight at HQ. Call is 1800. No later.

BILKS

Yes, sir. Thank you. Break a leg.

BIRD

Thank you, Sergeant.

Bilks shakes Fletcher's hand then exits.

BIRD

Fletcher. I do hope that you don't consider this an indictment of your performance.

FLATCHER

I only hoped to do what was right for Lieutenant Farewell and Second Lieutenant MacAllister. If I have failed—

BIRD

Oh no, you haven't failed!

ANDREWS

Acting's not for everyone, Fletcher.

BIRD

Hector.

ANDREWS

I am stating a fact.

FLATCHER

Honest, I don't mind a bit.

HENRY

Captain, I think this is a very wise solution.

BIRD

Thank you, Henry.

HENRY

Percy would be pleased.

ANDREWS

Percy would probably rather be alive than replaced in the play by Captain Bird.

HENRY

Hector.

ANDREWS

Why does everyone insist on Hectoring me? I do know my name.

HENRY

You are being impertinent.

ANDREWS

I am not being impertinent. I am merely stating the truth.

HENRY

Sometimes stating the truth is impertinence.

A shell goes off. Pretty close by. Screams follow.

BIRD

I will not be sad to leave this trench this afternoon.

ANDREWS

A hot bath.

BIRD

A soft bed.

FLATCHER

I will miss the fleas.

BIRD

You will miss the fleas?

FLATCHER

I find the fleas a little comforting. I know that life persists. When there are fleas on my collar.

Andrews and Bird look at each other. Andrews scratches his forehead. Bird scratches his nose.

ANDREWS

Captain, should we rehearse this scene?

BIRD

Yes. So, I am standing here. Fletcher, you can go stand near Henry. And Andrews you enter from there, yes, good.

Andrews "enters" holding his tin mug. He sees Bird and salutes. Bird has taken on a whole new persona. He looks weaker, but it is clear that he is acting, perhaps even acting well.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

Gordon old boy. How the devil are you?

BIRD as WILLY

Grand. I'm truly grand.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

What a pleasant surprise to see you here, I thought you were at the Somme. Dreadful news coming from the Somme from what I hear. You're lucky to be out of it—

Bilks runs on. His face is blistered and he is clearly blinded.

He runs into Fletcher.

FLATCHER

Bilks?

BILKS

Where am I?

Henry holds onto Bilks' shoulders. She sees that he is blinded, hit by gas.

HENRY

Sergeant Bilks, you're back in Trench 25. It's Henry. It looks like you've sustained a gas attack. Can you see anything?

BILKS

No!

Andrew and Bird look on in terror.

HENRY

We'll get you the help you need. We need to get you to a casualty clearing station.

BILKS

How? I can't see anything?

HENRY

Flatcher, will you take him?

FLATCHER

Of course.

ANDREWS

What about the stretcher bearers?

HENRY

They won't be fast enough.

Flatcher stands in front of Bilks, hoisting him up on his shoulders. Bilks struggles a little.

FLATCHER

It will be faster if I carry him.

HENRY

Smart thinking, Flatcher.

FLATCHER

Thank you, miss.

He runs off, the way Bilks came from.

HENRY
Flatcher!

He runs back on.

FLATCHER
Yes, miss?

HENRY
Don't go that way. You'll run straight into the gas.

FLATCHER
Yes, Miss.

He runs off again.

ANDREWS
Bird, do you have any gas masks in here?

Andrews peeks through the canvas door.

BIRD
Yes, under the bench.

Andrews goes through the canvas door.

Flatcher comes running back.

FLATCHER
Where's the CCS?

HENRY
The fastest route is down the trench past large oak tree and then across the field. It's a small farmhouse. You can't miss it. Lots of men lying about in stretchers on all sides.

Andrews comes out with the gas masks.

ANDREWS
Perfect. There are three!

He sees Flatcher and Bilks. He looks at Bird and Henry.

ANDREWS
What are you still doing here?

FLATCHER

I needed directions to the CCS.

ANDREWS

And did you get them?

FLATCHER

Yes. But I forget.

HENRY

Go down trench, past the large oak tree and then across the field. Small farmhouse.

BIRD

Lots of men lying about in stretchers.

FLATCHER

Men in stretchers.

BILKS

I'll remember, just get me there.

FLATCHER

You can talk?

BILKS

Yes. I'm blind. Not mute.

FLATCHER

Lucky break!

They exit.

Andrews hands out the gas masks.

HENRY

Should we have given one to Fletcher?

She puts her gas mask on.

ANDREWS

There were only three.

HENRY

(garbled)

So?

ANDREWS

He's going away from the gas.

Andrews puts his gas mask on. Bird has some trouble getting his on. Henry helps him.

They stand and look at each other wearing the gas masks.

BIRD

(garbled)

Should we take it again from the top of scene two?

HENRY

(garbled)

That's fine with me.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

What a pleasant surprise to see you here, I thought you were at the Somme. Dreadful news coming from the Somme from what I hear. You're lucky to be out of it. You look like you could use a stiff drink. I presume you still drink whisky.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I do.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

I'll make it a double.

Andrews mimes pouring Bird a drink.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

Chin, chin!

They drink.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

Damien. You look the same as ever.

Henry laughs a little at this, since they are wearing gas masks.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

Do I? I hoped I looked more worldly. More regal.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

You were always both, Damien. You know that.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

How is France?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

Tres bien.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

The women?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

The women are beautiful.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

How is your Laurel?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

We hope to marry when I next have my leave.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

When will that be?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I do not know.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

We should correspond more. I fear I have been remiss in not sending you letters.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I would very much like that.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

You were my greatest friend in school. And yet something about this war makes it difficult to put pen to paper when I need to the most. I am content to write to Eliza, but she only wants assurance that I am still alive and that I love only her. You. I could write to you about a great many things that would frighten poor Eliza.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I write everything to Laurel. Except one thing. Can you keep a secret?

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

Have you ever known me to be anything other than discreet?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

Never.

He takes a moment. He pretends to drink his whisky.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I am in love with someone else.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(VERY garbled)

Who is she?

Bird lifts up his mask.

BIRD

Do you think you could enunciate a little better? I'm having trouble picking up my cues with the masks.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

I will do my best.

Bird puts his mask down again.

BIRD

(garbled)

Thank you.

Andrews nods. He glances over at Henry.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

I am in love with someone else.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

Who is she?

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

She's a nurse. She's the kindest, loveliest woman I've ever met.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

A nurse, I'm surprised by you.

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

She went to university. She's a VAD.²⁹

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

Goodness, a bluestocking *and* a nurse!

BIRD as WILLY

(garbled)

You make it sound like you're disappointed.

ANDREWS as DAMIEN

(garbled)

I'm scandalized. Well done!

Bird lifts his gas mask.

BIRD

And then what's the blocking here?

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Keep your mask on, Bird! You'll get gassed.

BIRD

I'm trying to articulate myself. I can't do it with the mask on.

²⁹ Volunteer Aid Detachment

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Should we just stop for the day? It's almost 7. I have to get back to my men. Henry should probably head back to the CCS.

BIRD

So much for getting a full run-through the day of the show.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

It'll be grand. We'll all be grand.

HENRY

(garbled)

You're a terrific Willy, Bird.

Bird hangs his head in modesty.

BIRD

Oh please stop. I know you don't mean it.

HENRY

(garbled)

I do mean it. And put your mask back on. Andrews is right. If Bilks was in such terrible condition, then we should really be quite careful.

Bird puts his mask back on.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Henry, would you like me to walk you back to the CCS? I know that Percy usually did the honors, but in his absence...

HENRY

(garbled)

That's unnecessary.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Quite right.

HENRY

(garbled)

Oughtn't raise suspicions. They might think something unsavory.

BIRD

(garbled)

Better savory than sweet!

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Do you really think so?

BIRD

(garbled)

Oh yes, savory over sweet every time.

HENRY

(garbled)

Oh, goodness no. Sweet for sure.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

But you said unsavory, which would mean sweet. Right?

HENRY

(garbled)

Yes.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Then Bird should have said "Better unsavory than savory." Which, I suppose, doesn't work as well, which is probably why you didn't say it.

BIRD

(garbled)

Right.

HENRY

(garbled)

Should I take this with me?

BIRD

(garbled)

I'd think so, yes.

HENRY

(garbled)

What about Fletcher?

BIRD

(garbled)

If you cross paths with him, perhaps you could give it to him?

HENRY

(garbled)

Smart.

BIRD

(garbled)

We didn't rehearse our scene.

HENRY

(garbled)

We didn't!

BIRD

(garbled)

But I'm sure it'll be marvelous tonight. I'll go over my lines.

HENRY

(garbled)

And I'll do the same.

Henry begins to dress herself again. She puts her pants on, tucks her dress in. Finds her trench and cap. Puts them both on. Bird and Andrews turn away, as if it's impolite.

HENRY

(garbled)

So long!

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Goodbye Henry. See you tonight. God willing.

Bird lifts his mask, he can't help it.

BIRD

G'bye Hen!

She exits.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Hen?

BIRD

(garbled)
Too much?

ANDREWS

(garbled)
It's very informal.

BIRD

(garbled)
She's a lovely girl, isn't she?

ANDREWS

(garbled)
She's an actress.

BIRD

(garbled)
She's a nurse.

ANDREWS

(garbled)
You may think she likes you, but she's merely trying to get you to cast her in the next show.

BIRD

(garbled)
We're at war!

ANDREWS

(garbled)
Yes. There will be more shows. Won't there?

BIRD

(garbled)
I don't know.

ANDREWS

(garbled)
I suppose it depends on how this one goes.

BIRD

(garbled)
Bloody disaster, if you don't mind my saying so. Two dead. A gas attack! And it's not even opening!

ANDREWS

(garbled)

The production is cursed. This happens sometimes. The *As You Like It* that we did at Rugby was cursed. Our Audrey's voice changed the week before the performance. Then Orlando—you may be surprised to know that I was not playing Orlando—broke his leg in a cricket match the day before the show. But he did it with a crutch and everyone thought it a *choice*.

BIRD

(garbled)

So you're saying it could still go well tonight.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

It's possible. But not likely.

Flatcher runs on.

FLATCHER

Bird?

BIRD

(garbled)

Yes?

FLATCHER

Why are you wearing that mask?

BIRD

(garbled)

Because Bilks was in that gas attack.

FLATCHER

Oh.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

Did you see Henry?

FLATCHER

I saw a man wearing a gas mask.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

That was probably her.

FLATCHER

It was a man that I saw.

ANDREWS

(garbled)

She has to dress like a man so that she doesn't get caught coming here.

FLATCHER

Is she not supposed to be here?

ANDREWS

(garbled)

She's a VAD.

FLATCHER

Is that a bad thing? It sounds like a bad thing.

Bird lifts his mask off.

BIRD

Did you get Bilks to the CCS alright?

FLATCHER

I did.

BIRD

Do they think he'll be alright for tonight's performance?

FLATCHER

I didn't ask.

ANDREWS

(lifting up his mask)

Honestly, Bertie, is that all you're worried about? Bilks has probably lost his sight and you want to know if he can perform tonight?

BIRD

I'm just curious.

FLATCHER

I suppose we'll find out.

BIRD

Flatcher, you will have to play the part of Gordon's father.

ANDREWS

Brilliant. That will really play.

BIRD

It's our only option!

ANDREWS

There are so many other options! We could just *not* perform the play.

BIRD

After all this time and energy rehearsing? It would be a waste!

FLATCHER

Oh! There was one more piece of news that I thought you might like to hear.

BIRD

Yes?

FLATCHER

Edward, the Prince of Wales, will be at HQ tonight.

BIRD

The Prince of Wales!

FLATCHER

That's what they were saying at the CCS.

ANDREWS

Oh dear.

BIRD

The show *must* go on!

ANDREWS

For the Prince?

BIRD

Did they say whether the Prince was expecting to see the play?

FLATCHER

That was not discussed.

BIRD

No, I suppose that makes sense.

ANDREWS

You can't possibly think that we should go through with it now!

BIRD

The Prince! This is my—this is *our* chance to show the Prince what life in the trenches is really like. What life on the front is really like. It is our duty as British subjects to show him Felix's play.

ANDREWS

The play isn't that good.

BIRD

It is good! It is a wonderful play. And you are wonderful in it. And I will be wonderful in it.

ANDREWS

But Bilks is blinded and Flatcher is... (*he looks at Flatcher*) unrehearsed and you and Henry haven't rehearsed your scene together. So rather than presenting a play, we will be presenting a disaster. To the Prince!

BIRD

You are too cynical. I've never liked how cynical you are.

ANDREWS

I am cynical because I am intelligent.

BIRD

You are cynical because you will never be happy. And you wish to foist that on the rest of us.

ANDREWS

Bird. I am returning to my men. I suggest that you think very long and very hard about whether you want to do the play tonight, given the circumstances.

BIRD

I do. I will.

ANDREWS

Oh, don't quote Prince Hal at me right now. I'm not your Falstaff. If anything you're my Falstaff!

BIRD

I am not your Falstaff. Rescind that comment immediately.

ANDREWS

I do not. I will not.

A standoff.

BIRD

You are insufferable! You think you're smarter than all of us, but really you're just a prig. Henry may as well lift her skirts up over her head for you and you'd never notice because she's not a proper lady with tracts of land and a wealthy father.

Someone approaches, wearing a gas mask. Only Fletcher sees.

ANDREWS

I'll have you know that I thought about bagging her today.

BIRD

Today!

ANDREWS

Well, tonight. After the show, I thought. After a hot bath and some full-bodied wine.

BIRD

I will not allow that to happen.

ANDREWS

I don't believe you'll have control one way or the other.

BIRD

Monstrous. You are monstrous.

ANDREWS

Are you jealous?

BIRD

Jealous? Why would I be jealous?

ANDREWS

Because you fancy Henry.

BIRD

I think Henry is a charming woman. Vibrant, intelligent.

ANDREWS

Oh, come off it.

BIRD

She is!

The man in the gas mask approaches.

BIRD

Oh, hello. May I help you?

HENRY

(garbled)

I left my script here.

BIRD

I can't understand you with the mask on, sir.

Henry takes the mask off.

BIRD

Oh! Henry! Hello.

HENRY

I left my script.

BIRD

Oh!

Henry walks over to her script.

HENRY

Here it is.

BIRD

You need that!

HENRY

Hopefully I don't.

BIRD

Yes. Right.

An awkward silence.

HENRY

Were you talking about me?

ANDREWS

No.

BIRD

We were.

HENRY

I see.

BIRD

I was defending your honor. Andrews said something most ungenerous about you.

HENRY

Did he?

BIRD

He did.

HENRY

What did you say, Hector?

ANDREWS

I... I said that I had hoped to seduce you tonight. After the performance. If the performance happens.

HENRY

Did you?

ANDREWS

Yes. Bird took it as indecorous. Which I suppose it was. I apologize.

HENRY

Golly.

FLATCHER

I heard the whole thing. They're telling the truth, Miss.

HENRY

Thank you, Fletcher.

BIRD

I hope you know that your honor is most important to me, Miss George.

HENRY

Thank you, Bird.

A moment. She looks at Andrews.

HENRY

It's a funny thing, Hector. You see, I had hoped to seduce you after the performance tonight.

ANDREWS

Did you?

Bird looks agape, crushed.

HENRY

But if you would prefer to do the seducing, please, have at it.

She puts her gas mask back on.

HENRY

(garbled)

See you tonight.

She exits, with her script.

ANDREWS

How's that, Bird?

BIRD

I find that profoundly depressing.

ANDREWS

I'm very sorry. Truly.

BIRD

No you aren't.

ANDREWS

You're right. I'm not.

BIRD

Perhaps we should cancel the performance.

ANDREWS

You wouldn't.

BIRD

You're right. Bilks is blind, Flatcher is incompetent (sorry Flatcher, but you really are a terrible actor and should probably just be shot), you're an ignominious prick and I'm really doing all of this for my own ego because I'm terrified that I'm going to die tomorrow and won't be remembered for anything worthwhile. But most importantly because I will not allow you to seduce Henrietta George after the performance.

FLATCHER

I thought you liked my performance.

BIRD

I did not. I was acting.

FLATCHER

That's not very nice.

BIRD

I know. I'm sorry. But I'm actually not a very nice person.

ANDREWS

It's the war.

BIRD

It's not the war. It's just who I am.

ANDREWS

You would sacrifice all of this work, just for a grudge. For the honor of a woman.

BIRD

Yes.

ANDREWS

Pity.

FLATCHER

So we aren't doing the play.

BIRD

No.

FLATCHER

Shame.

BIRD

You didn't even want to do the play.

FLATCHER

I did. This has been more meaningful to me than anything I've ever done.

ANDREWS

Has it?

FLATCHER

You've believed in me! You gave me the opportunity to to grow and have responsibilities!

A large shell explosion hits the trench. Everything goes red and then black.

Screams of pain, sounds of searing flesh and gas.

FLATCHER

Sir! Sir!

ANDREWS

We need a stretcher out here.

FLATCHER

Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no.

ANDREWS

Pipe down, Fletcher. Are all your limbs there?

FLATCHER

Yes.

ANDREWS

Good. Shut up.

Running, grunting. The sound of a body being lifted onto a stretcher.

FLATCHER

Is he dead?

ANDREWS

Gosh, I hope not.

More sounds of running.

Lights up on Bird lying on the table and nothing else. Henry enters, dressed fully like a nurse.

HENRY

Oh Bertie. What has happened to you?

STRETCHER-BEARER (Bilks, doubling)

Hit by a shell.

HENRY

Goodness.

STRETCHER-BEARER

Whole trench just sunk under.

HENRY

The others in the trench?

STRETCHER-BEARER

I don't know, nurse. We just took this one right here.

HENRY

Thank you.

Stretcher-bearer exits. Henry looks at Bird.

HENRY AS NURSE

Captain Bird, can you hear me?

Bird doesn't respond.

HENRY as NURSE

I can't see anything wrong with him, but he is unresponsive.

She leans over him.

HENRY as NURSE

Oh Bertie. What has happened to you? Yesterday you were so full of life. And now? You are cold. Unresponsive. Do you remember how you kissed my hand and called me your daffodil? I remember. I will always remember, Bertie Bird.

She begins to exit.

Bird sits up. He looks out at the audience.

BIRD

I remember the way the tea kettle used to whistle at our house in Devon. The way that steam would rise from my cup on a cold morning. I would walk to the cliffs overlooking the sea and think that I wanted to be anywhere but there. I wanted to see the world. I wanted adventure. I wanted romance and madness. I imagined the whistle of the kettle was like the whistle of a ship, calling to me.

But madness and romance and adventure were not for me. Not as far as mother and father were concerned. I was to be educated. I was to be scholarly. I was to go to Cambridge. And so I did. I was to work in a bank. And so I did.

And then when war broke out, there was no one to stop me. In fact, it was heartily encouraged. So madness and adventure and possibly even romance would come for me after all. War is all these things and yet we hate it. It is none of these things and yet we fight it.

I've been hit, but I don't know where and I don't remember how. Perhaps it doesn't matter.

But listen. The whistle of a tea kettle. It beckons.

The whistle of a tea kettle turns into the screaming of a shell.

Bird looks up in fear.

Black out.

End of play.

The Next War

By Kate Mulley

Cast of characters

Diana Kirkland- orthopedic surgeon at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, 43

Ishmael Blanco- specialist in the United States Army, 27

Colonel Jared Isaacson- Chief of Orthopedic Surgery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, late-mid 50s.

General Wayne Kirkland- Retired three-star general in the United States Army, Diana's father, mid-70s

Mary Kirkland- Diana's mother, early 70s.
Carmen/Nurse

Setting

Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Spring 2011
Chevy Chase, MD

*Diana enters the space in a towel, she looks around,
it's dark.*

DIANA

Home.
The bed I sat on writing college applications.
Med school applications.
Residency applications.
Fellowship applications.
I thought it would take a miracle or a tragedy to bring me back here.
Away from the life I made.
The life that I suffered to create.
The life that I always felt like I was one step behind.
Never quite reaching those goals that I made.
Penn, not Princeton
Vanderbilt, not Harvard
UCLA, not Mass General.
And now home.
Now I'm here.
In my teenage room with my teenage things.
43.
Not old.
Some people think 43 is old.
I don't think 43 is old.
Because I'm 43.
My parents are old.
The General is leathered.
My mother is a strange bird.
A fraction of herself.
The General had hoped to be in Florida half the year.
My mother's mind?
Not so much.
Stability is here.
Rehab is here.
Florida will have to wait.
Until things get better.
And then I get to go back to my real life.
If it's even there when I get back.
Lives often don't stay where they were.
They move on.
And I stay behind.

A voice from off. The General.

GENERAL

Diana!

Yeah?

DIANA

5 minutes!

GENERAL

Ok! I'll be down in 3.

DIANA

Good!

GENERAL

*Diana throws the towel off. She begins to dress.
Underwear, bra, shirt, slacks. She looks at herself in
a mirror. She smooths out her hair.*

She exits.

*Music pulses and becomes the honking of a car and
the beeping of a hospital.*

Diana enters, she has a bag over her shoulder.

Colonel Isaacson enters.

Diana Kirkland?

ISAACSON

That's me.

DIANA

Colonel Isaacson. We spoke on the phone.

ISAACSON

Colonel Isaacson, it's a pleasure to meet you.

DIANA

Welcome to Walter Reed.

ISAACSON

Thank you, sir.

DIANA

You're a sight for sore eyes.

ISAACSON

DIANA
(huh?)

Thank you.

ISAACSON

Half our surgeons are off to Bethesda already. The transition is in full swing. It's chaos in the meantime. Chaos here. Chaos there. Medevacs still streaming in from Landstuhl every day and half the staff to handle it. So your help is much appreciated. I think I told you all this on the phone?

DIANA

You did.

ISAACSON

I repeat myself sometimes. In times of stress. I don't remember who I tell what.

DIANA

PTSD?

ISAACSON

Hmm.

DIANA

A lot of memory loss is related to PTSD.

ISAACSON

Yes, Dr. Kirkland. That's something I'm certainly aware of.

DIANA

Oh. I wouldn't. I didn't mean—

ISAACSON

When'd you fly in?

DIANA

Friday.

ISAACSON

Still on West Coast time?

DIANA

I might be.

ISAACSON

0600 call on West Coast time. Let's get you some coffee.

DIANA

Oh, I have a—

She produces a thermos out of her bag.

DIANA

My dad made it.

ISAACSON

That's nice of him.

DIANA

It's very strong.

ISAACSON

I wouldn't expect anything less.

DIANA

Oh, do you know my father?

ISAACSON

I've seen him around, certainly. We've been introduced.

DIANA

He's intense, but his intentions are usually in the right place.

She takes a sip of the coffee.

DIANA

Oh. It's borderline undrinkable.

ISAACSON

So's the stuff in the mess hall.

DIANA

I figured.

ISAACSON

I've got a Keurig in my office. If you bring your own K-cups.

DIANA

Thank you.

ISAACSON

I'm kidding. You don't need to bring your own K-cups.

Ok.
We're not that hard up here.
No.
So, let's get you to an office.
Great.
Maybe even your own Keurig machine.
Now that's too much!
If you don't get used to your father's coffee.
Yeah, we'll see about that.

DIANA

ISAACSON

DIANA

ISAACSON

DIANA

ISAACSON

DIANA

ISAACSON

DIANA

Isaacson gestures, they exit.

Ishmael is wheeled on by an orderly. She takes his vitals. He winces a bit. He's clearly in pain.

Diana enters. She has a clipboard.

Ishmael Blanco?
Present.
Specialist Blanco. (*a moment*) May I call—
Me Ishmael? Knock yourself out.

DIANA

ISHMAEL

DIANA

ISHMAEL

DIANA

Is there a name you prefer?

ISHMAEL

Everyone just calls me Blanco. Or Ish. Back in the day. But Ishmael's cool. I can be Ishmael for you.

A beat. Ishmael is flirting, Diana's not.

DIANA

Ok. Ishmael. Your surgeon, Dr. Gonzalez, has transferred over to Bethesda. I'm taking over his patients in the interim. Before the integration.

ISHMAEL

You a doctor?

DIANA

I am. I—I'm Doctor Kirkland.

ISHMAEL

Nice to meet you Doctor Kirkland.

DIANA

How are you doing today?

ISHMAEL

Great! My foot feels like it's getting stabbed by a fiery knife every 30 seconds.

DIANA

That's not good.

ISHMAEL

It's not, is it.

She refers to her files.

DIANA

Looks like you had surgery on your foot a week ago?

ISHMAEL

Nah, 3 days.

DIANA

Ok. And it's your second surgery?

ISHMAEL

Third.

DIANA

Oh.

She looks up from the file.

ISHMAEL

You sure you got my file there?

DIANA

I do.

ISHMAEL

It's just wrong?

DIANA

It appears to be lacking some information.

ISHMAEL

Uh huh.

DIANA

So just to be clear. You had surgery on your foot on Thursday.

ISHMAEL

Correct.

DIANA

And it was your third surgery since arriving at Walter Reed.

ISHMAEL

No. I had surgery in Germany. And two more here.

DIANA

I see.

ISHMAEL

But that one isn't in there?

DIANA

Doesn't look like it is.

ISHMAEL

Fuck me.

He looks at Diana.

ISHMAEL
No disrespect. But this place...

DIANA
I understand. It must be very frustrating for you.

ISHMAEL
Sure is.

DIANA
Before we get into anything else, I'd like to just chat for a bit. About your life.

ISHMAEL
Huh. Ok.

DIANA
Because I'm new here, I'm still adjusting to the culture, but this is the way I like to start off with my patients. I'm going to put this away (*she puts the file away*) and just listen.

ISHMAEL
Yeah?

DIANA
Where are you from, Ishmael?

ISHMAEL
Baltimore.

DIANA
So your family's not that far. That's good.

ISHMAEL
Oh, they're in Chicago now. Dad got a new job.

DIANA
What does he do now?

ISHMAEL
He's a Religion professor? At Northwestern.

DIANA
Was he at Hopkins before that?

ISHMAEL
Yeah.

DIANA
And your mom?

ISHMAEL
She worked in Admissions at Hopkins, not really sure what she's up to at Northwestern.

DIANA
You ask her?

ISHMAEL
I've been a little preoccupied.

DIANA
To ask your mom what she does?

ISHMAEL
Yes.

DIANA
Are you an only child?

ISHMAEL
Ha. No. I have a younger sister. Dorothea.

DIANA
Middlemarch?

ISHMAEL
Yup.

DIANA
Your parents liked the classics.

ISHMAEL
Dad liked religious names. Mom was on bed rest and read Great Books to keep herself occupied. They settled on Ishmael and Dorothea.

DIANA
How was that?

ISHMAEL
What?

DIANA
Growing up in Baltimore with names like Ishmael and Dorothea.

Character building.

ISHMAEL

Where's your sister now?

DIANA

Uhh... Back in Chicago. She graduated from college last year? Just applied to a bunch of law schools.

ISHMAEL

Have you seen them since you got back?

DIANA

Yeah, they came out when I first got here. Then spring semester started.

ISHMAEL

And you guys talk?

DIANA

Dad likes to email. Mom calls on Sunday nights. Thea... she doesn't know what to say to me, so she'll text what's up and a bunch of emoticons?

ISHMAEL

That doesn't sound that bad.

DIANA

It's ok.

ISHMAEL

Any friends from Baltimore come to visit you here?

DIANA

Nah. I don't really keep up with any of them.

ISHMAEL

Any particular reason?

DIANA

A beat.

ISHMAEL

What kind of doctor are you?

DIANA

I'm an orthopedic surgeon.

ISHMAEL
You sound like a shrink.

DIANA
I'm just trying to learn more about you.

ISHMAEL
Uh huh. What's that got to do with my foot?

DIANA
It's you, right? Your foot is part of you.

ISHMAEL
Ok...

DIANA
What about friends here at Walter Reed?

ISHMAEL
There are some guys I know.

DIANA
But no one really close?

ISHMAEL
I didn't join the Army to make friends.

DIANA
Why did you enlist?

ISHMAEL
I was kind of a fuck up in high school. Shitty grades, decent SATs, but wouldn't have gotten into a good school. Figured I'd save my parents the shame of telling people I went to a shitty school.

DIANA
How'd they take it?

ISHMAEL
Not well. But they've been able to reframe it so they feel better about themselves. Magical thinking.

DIANA
Do you think they're proud of you now?

ISHMAEL
Because my truck drove over an IED and I managed to survive? I don't think so.

That's what happened to your foot?

DIANA

Yeah.

ISHMAEL

Tough luck.

DIANA

Ishmael laughs.

ISHMAEL
That's a way of putting it. Translator died. So did one of the Privates. His first month in Afghanistan...

How long had you been there?

DIANA

Was just wrapping up my third tour.

ISHMAEL

That's a lot.

DIANA

Third time's a charm.

ISHMAEL

Her beeper goes off.

Hold on.

DIANA

She looks at her beeper, she frowns, she looks back up at Ishmael.

DIANA
I'm so sorry, but I have to check in with another patient. Before I go, I'm going to take a quick look at your foot.

ISHMAEL
Ok.

DIANA
On a scale of 1 to—

ISHMAEL

It's a 6.

DIANA

With stabbing pain.

ISHMAEL

That's right.

*She goes to his foot, begins to unwrap the bandages.
She examines. He watches her.*

DIANA

I see a lot of scar tissue and what might be the beginning of an infection.

ISHMAEL

Shit.

DIANA

It might be ok, but we'll continue to monitor it.

ISHMAEL

Ok.

DIANA

Let the nurses know if anything changes. Pain-wise.

ISHMAEL

Yes, ma'am.

*He salutes, Diana looks at him, isn't sure how to
respond and exits.*

*The living room at the Kirkland House. The General
sits with a scotch and an iPad. Mary has a glass of
ice water in front of her. A bowl of mixed nuts. Mary
is out of it, but it's not totally clear what's wrong with
her.*

Silence. Then,

GENERAL

God, Northern Africa is a shitstorm.

MARY

Mmhmm.

GENERAL

Mubarak is out in Egypt. Kids in the streets for a couple weeks and all of a sudden he resigns.

MARY

Egypt?

GENERAL

Listen to this:

"On Friday, pro-democracy demonstrators achieved through peaceful and determined protests what only a month ago had seemed impossible: They forced President Hosni Mubarak from office.

"Mubarak thought he was God," Ali Asam, 50, said as he stood just outside Tahrir Square, named after the Arabic word for liberation. "He killed the people, he beat the people, and we won."

In the end, images of riot police and pro-government thugs attacking and killing unarmed civilians are what broke Mubarak. Rather than force people off the streets through intimidation, the violence simply galvanized more to join the revolt."

MARY

Good for them.

GENERAL

I suppose.

MARY

We like democracy.

GENERAL

We do.

MARY

Think they'll send troops in?

GENERAL

What troops, everyone's surging in Afghanistan.

MARY

Surging. Everyone's always surging.

GENERAL

Not always. If we were always surging there would be no such thing as a surge.

MARY

It seems like we're always surging.

GENERAL
We're not. We just don't talk about the rest.

MARY
Is Diana upstairs?

GENERAL
She is.

MARY
What's she doing up there?

GENERAL
I don't know. I'm sure she'll be down soon.

MARY
Good. I want to hear about her day.

GENERAL
It sounded eventful.

MARY
That place is haunted.

GENERAL
Walter Reed isn't haunted.

MARY
Of course it is.

GENERAL
You think everywhere is haunted.

MARY
Everywhere is haunted. But I could always feel it at Walter Reed.

GENERAL
It's a wonder you leave the house.

MARY
That's not very nice.

GENERAL
Terrified of ghosts and spirits and death.

MARY
I am not terrified. I just don't like the energy there.

Well, in six months it'll be empty.

GENERAL

And even more haunted.

MARY

Whatever you say.

GENERAL

A moment.

I'm thirsty.

MARY

Drink your water.

GENERAL

She looks at him. She picks up her ice water. It shakes in her hand.

It's cold!

MARY

General goes back to reading his ipad. Mary brings the glass up to her mouth cautiously. Mary spills.

Damnit!

MARY

General looks over.

Oh for God's sake. DIANA! Can you come down here please?

GENERAL

It's cold!

MARY

The sound of a woman running down a flight of stairs. Diana appears. She's wearing a UPenn sweatshirt and jeans.

What happened?

DIANA

She spilled her water.

GENERAL

DIANA

Ok.

GENERAL

Can you get a towel?

Diana exits, returns with a towel, she holds it out to her father. He looks at it, looks at her. She kneels down to try to deal with the spill.

MARY

What a mess!

DIANA

I know, Mom. Dad should have given you a straw.

She glares at her father. He looks at her steely-eyed. Mary looks down at the spill.

GENERAL

Your mother hates straws.

DIANA

They're unladylike. I know.

GENERAL

For fifty-three years I've known one thing about Mary Lee Kirkland. No straws.

DIANA

Dad.

GENERAL

On our first date. We go a movie. I order a bottle of Coke.

Diana has heard this story before.

GENERAL

I ask for two straws—

DIANA

And Mom says "I hope you're planning on using both of those. A *lady* doesn't use a straw." And orders her own Coke.

GENERAL

53 years.

I know. DIANA

And now I'm supposed to give her a straw. GENERAL

Yes. DIANA

Carmen didn't tell me that. GENERAL

Who's Carmen? DIANA

The aide. GENERAL

Have you seen her use a straw? DIANA

I don't know. GENERAL

Can you get her another shirt? DIANA

General goes without saying anything. The sound of a man's feet walking down a hallway.

Hi Mom. Are you ok? DIANA

I'm a little cold. MARY

Yeah, Dad's getting you another shirt. DIANA

How was your day? MARY

It was good. DIANA

Did you see any ghosts? MARY

I didn't.

DIANA

Did you see anyone die?

MARY

No. I—maybe? I don't remember.

DIANA

You don't remember?

MARY

It was a long day.

DIANA

She sees the scotch on the table. She walks over to it, takes a sip. Takes a larger sip.

That's your father's.

MARY

I know. Your shirt is soaking wet. I'm going to take it off, ok?

DIANA

Why?

MARY

Dad went to get you another shirt. I'm going to take this one off so you aren't cold anymore.

DIANA

I'm fine.

MARY

Mom. I don't want you to start shivering.

DIANA

I'm fine!

MARY

Please don't be stubborn about this.

DIANA

Why not?

MARY

DIANA

Because it's not worth it.

A stand-off. Diana breaks first.

DIANA

Dad!!

From off:

GENERAL

Hold your horses.

Diana puts the General's glass down. Turns back to Mary.

DIANA

How was your day?

MARY

Very nice. We went for a walk in Rock Creek Park. The birds were very pretty, but it was a little cold.

DIANA

You and Dad?

MARY

Me and Carmen.

DIANA

I see.

Diana finds a glass of her own. She pours herself a scotch on the rocks.

MARY

When did you start drinking scotch?

DIANA

I don't know.

MARY

I think it's disgusting.

Diana looks at her.

DIANA
I'm sure Dad turned me onto it at some point.

A shift.

MARY
Do I need to worry about you?

DIANA
Absolutely not.

MARY
Good because—

General enters with a button up shirt, hands it to Diana.

GENERAL
Here.

DIANA
Mom, I'm going to take this shirt off and put this one on you. Ok?

MARY
Whatever.

DIANA
(to the General)
Charming.

GENERAL
Every debutante eventually loses her charm.

DIANA
You don't say.

Diana takes Mary's shirt off. She hands it to the General, who holds it out like it's gross. Diana puts the clean shirt on Mary, buttons it up for her. The General reaches out for the scotch that Diana poured herself.

DIANA
That one's mine.

GENERAL

Ah.

He puts it down. He finds his scotch glass.

DIANA
(to Mary)

Good as new!

MARY

Thank you.

The General hands Diana the wet shirt.

DIANA

Thanks.

She hangs the wet shirt on the back of an empty chair.

The General sits down, takes a draught of scotch, picks up a handful of nuts and munches on them. Diana continues to stand.

DIANA

What's for dinner?

GENERAL

Jason's making a Bolognese.

DIANA

Is Jason new?

GENERAL

Couple months.

DIANA

He any good?

GENERAL

He is. He was working for Yoffe, but Yoffe's in Boca til April, so I thought I would throw him a bone.

DIANA

I'll go introduce myself.

GENERAL

You can do that later. Mom wants to tell you about her day.

DIANA

She already did. Walk in Rock Creek Park. Cold.

GENERAL

All caught up.

DIANA

Yup.

MARY

I'm still thirsty.

DIANA

I'll get you another water.

MARY

Ok.

DIANA

Did you take your pill yet?

GENERAL

She did.

DIANA

Ok. Good.

Diana takes the glass and exits.

*Mary and the General sit in silence, he reads his ipad.
He takes a handful of mixed nuts. She watches him.
He gestures towards her like "you want one?" She
nods.*

*He walks over and holds his hand out. She picks out a
cashew. She pops it in her mouth. She chews.*

He walks back to his seat. She smiles.

Diana returns with a glass of ice water and a straw.

DIANA

Jason's doing carbonara, not Bolognese.

She hands Mary the glass of ice water. She watches her drink through the straw.

Good job.
DIANA

I hate straws.
MARY

I know.
DIANA

Ladies do not drink out of straws.
MARY

Yeah, but ladies who have just had strokes sometimes have to. Keeps you from spilling.
DIANA

You should sit. Been on your feet all day.
GENERAL
(to Diana)

I think I need my own car.
DIANA

Why? I'm happy to drive you.
GENERAL

It's such a hassle.
DIANA

I'm up early anyway.
GENERAL

But so many nights I'll have to work late.
DIANA

I don't mind.
GENERAL

I know you don't mind. I'm saying I want to get my own car.
DIANA

General thinks, eats a handful of nuts.

GENERAL

Whitson's got this old Beemer he's been talking about off-loading for a year or two. We can check the blue book price. Make an offer.

DIANA

A Beemer?

GENERAL

You prefer a Benz? Not sure what surgeons drive out in LA.

DIANA

You think I should show up to Walter Reed in a Beemer?

GENERAL

A used Beemer.

DIANA

Who's going to notice?

GENERAL

Anyone paying attention.

Diana thinks for a moment.

DIANA

Ok, you want to give Whitson a call, I'll take a look at it on Saturday.

GENERAL

Whitson owes me a favor or two, so we could probably knock the price down.

DIANA

Ok.

GENERAL

But I really don't mind driving you. And if it's a hassle you can always take a cab.

DIANA

Right, but it's one thing to live at home with you and Mom. It's another one entirely to be reliant on you for rides. To work.

GENERAL

Understood.

DIANA

And at some point, I think we should talk about how long you want me to live here.

As long as you like.

GENERAL

But really...

DIANA

It's up to you.

GENERAL

That's not fair.

DIANA

What's not fair?

GENERAL

You can't pin it all on me.

DIANA

You insisted on moving back and helping out.

GENERAL

That's not exactly how I remember it.

DIANA

Well, you're here. Your mother is thrilled. Aren't you, Mary?

GENERAL

Mary looks at the General, smiles a bit.

You want some more water, Mom?

DIANA

Mary nods her head. Diana stands next to her, holding the glass while she sips from the straw.

It'll be great.

GENERAL

Ok, Dad.

DIANA

How's the screenwriter?

GENERAL

We're still separated.

DIANA

Which means what, exactly?

GENERAL

Well, I'm here.

DIANA

For your mother.

GENERAL

Yes.

DIANA

Are you getting a divorce?

GENERAL

Maybe.

DIANA

Did he fool around on you?

GENERAL

Dad!

DIANA

Did he?

GENERAL

She considers.

It's possible.

DIANA

You work so much.

GENERAL

Are you saying it's permissible because I work a lot?

DIANA

Of course not. But fidelity has its challenges.

GENERAL

Diana takes a quick drink of scotch. Mary scoffs a bit.

This is a conversation I would rather not have right now.

DIANA

A bell rings from off.

GENERAL

Oh, that's dinner.

DIANA

You know you don't have to wait for me to come home to eat.

GENERAL

We always eat pretty late.

DIANA

I'm just saying.

GENERAL

We are a civilized family, Diana. We will eat together whenever it's possible.

DIANA

I don't want you to feel obligated.

GENERAL

Absolutely not. You want to help your mother into the kitchen?

DIANA

Sure. *(she turns to Mary)* Mom, let's go have dinner.

MARY

What's for dinner?

DIANA

Pasta.

MARY

Yum!

*Diana positions herself so that she can help Mary up
and they slowly walk off.*

GENERAL

I've got your scotch.

DIANA

Thanks.

*The General picks up the scotch glasses. Downs his
and brings Diana's with him.*

Shift to:

Ishmael's hospital room. He's sitting with his iPad, watching an episode of The Wire. A nurse comes in, takes his vitals.

After a moment, Diana enters.

Ishmael?	DIANA
Doc!	ISHMAEL
You busy?	DIANA
A little.	ISHMAEL
I wanted to check in.	DIANA
Uh huh.	ISHMAEL
What are you watching?	DIANA
The Wire?	ISHMAEL
Nice.	DIANA
You seen it?	ISHMAEL
I have. What season?	DIANA
Two.	ISHMAEL
The docks?	DIANA

Yup.

ISHMAEL

So, how's your foot doing today?

DIANA

Still not great.

ISHMAEL

Still a 6?

DIANA

Something like that. Right now it's a 4. When I'm up it's a 7.

ISHMAEL

Ok.

DIANA

Is that bad?

ISHMAEL

I wouldn't say it's bad.

DIANA

What would you say it is?

ISHMAEL

It's unfortunate.

DIANA

So what happens now?

ISHMAEL

What do you want?

DIANA

Stronger pain meds?

ISHMAEL

Nope.

DIANA

Why not?

ISHMAEL

DIANA

The meds you're currently on are highly addictive. We should really transition you to over the counter NSAIDs to prevent an addiction from forming.

ISHMAEL

What?

DIANA

Ibuprofen, advil.

ISHMAEL

For a foot full of shrapnel?

DIANA

We could also try alternative treatments.

ISHMAEL

Yeah?

DIANA

You ever try acupuncture?

ISHMAEL

I'm afraid of needles.

Diana looks at him.

ISHMAEL

Ask the nurses. I pass out when they draw blood.

DIANA

But combat's no problem.

ISHMAEL

Funny, right?

DIANA

Acupuncture's different. We could even do it now if you want.

ISHMAEL

Now?

DIANA

You have time?

ISHMAEL
(gestures to his iPad)

I mean, Omar's waiting.

DIANA

Omar can wait.

ISHMAEL

I don't know. Man's got a bit of a temper on him.

DIANA

He does.

ISHMAEL

So you just stick some needles in me and I'm cured?

DIANA

It's a little more complicated than that.

ISHMAEL

I mean, it's bullshit, right?

DIANA

You don't want to try it? You don't have to. But it's a valid option for pain management in your case.

ISHMAEL

I don't know.

DIANA

Think about it.

ISHMAEL

Sure. Ok.

DIANA

So this is your first time receiving treatment at Walter Reed?

ISHMAEL

Yes.

DIANA

In your other two tours did you need to receive medical treatment in any capacity?

ISHMAEL

I got my wisdom teeth out at one point.

That's it? DIANA

That's it. ISHMAEL

And you've been otherwise healthy. DIANA

Uh huh. ISHMAEL

Mentally and physically? DIANA

You think I got PTSD? ISHMAEL

I don't know. Do you? DIANA

I saw some terrible things. But I think I'm ok. ISHMAEL

You know there are people you can talk to about it. DIANA

Yup. I have a bunch of pamphlets. Bases are covered. ISHMAEL

And I'm available to talk, if you have trouble finding someone you trust. DIANA

Cool. ISHMAEL

A moment.

Before you enlisted, what did you do for fun? DIANA

Seriously? ISHMAEL

Yeah. DIANA

ISHMAEL
Uh. Drink, smoke... sometimes I made these little movies.

DIANA
Movies?

ISHMAEL
Yeah, they were silly, but I would steal this old Panasonic thing from my parents' basement and just kind of dick around, you know?

DIANA
Did you have actors?

ISHMAEL
Yeah, I mean, my friends would help out. I got out of writing some English papers by making movies about books.

DIANA
Oh yeah?

ISHMAEL
I was a crafty kid.

DIANA
I can tell.

ISHMAEL
Sometimes in Afghanistan I would try to imagine what kind of movies I would make there, you know?

DIANA
And?

ISHMAEL
I mean, it's gorgeous there in this really crazy way. Like, I've never seen anything like it. Certainly not growing up in Baltimore. But then, everything else is just so fucked up. So, like, there's juxtaposition.

DIANA
Did you ever write about it?

ISHMAEL
No, I'm not much of a writer.

DIANA
What if you journalled about it?

Journalled?

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

You want me to scrapbook my experiences or some shit?

ISHMAEL

It might be useful for you to process things through writing.

DIANA

I don't have anything to process.

ISHMAEL

We all have something to process.

DIANA

Yeah? What do you have to process?

ISHMAEL

My mom isn't doing well. So I'm back here, helping out.

DIANA

Oh. Yeah, that's tough.

ISHMAEL

So that's what I'm processing.

DIANA

Are you two close?

ISHMAEL

Diana takes a moment to think about the answer.

DIANA

I don't know. I guess we're not.

ISHMAEL

Are you writing about it?

DIANA

No.

ISHMAEL

You should write about.

Maybe I will.

DIANA

I'll do it if you do.

ISHMAEL

Great. Every morning. Three pages, before you do anything else.

DIANA

Ok. And you'll do the same?

ISHMAEL

Why not. And I'll get you set up with an appointment at the acupuncture clinic.

DIANA

Fine.

ISHMAEL

You just have to do it once. Try anything once.

DIANA

Uh huh.

ISHMAEL

Is there anything else?

DIANA

Can I get back to Omar?

ISHMAEL
(indicating his iPad)

You can.

DIANA

Cool.

ISHMAEL

Enjoy.

DIANA

Diana exits. Ishmael puts his earbuds back in.

Diana's bedroom. Before dawn. She's writing.

DIANA

I told my patient to do morning pages and he called my bluff. Told me that I should do them too. Not a bad idea.

Smart kid.

Man.

I guess if these guys are dying for our freedom in Afghanistan, I should call them men, right?

It's humbling.

This place.

I'm exhausted in a way that I wasn't in LA.

I know it's only been a week.

And I can't believe it's only been a week.

Being home.

Being back with Mom and Dad.

Being at a new hospital with all the new protocols and standards and totally different patients.

Never in a million years did I think I would end up here.

Walter Reed.

I wrote my med school essay about Walter Reed.

I bet I can find a hard copy somewhere in one of these boxes.

Something about the doctors at Walter Reed making me want to be a doctor?

Did I even believe that?

Or was I so cynical at 23 that I thought it would get me into Harvard.

Always that chip on my shoulder

Still

Now

I write Harvard as if I could have gone there.

As if it was a mistake that I didn't get in.

Seeing Mom like this is weird.

I mean, she's been bad before.

She's been up and down forever.

And Dad seems to think that I can help more than I can.

Or that my presence somehow absolves him from being helpful.

In any way.

Not used to being a caregiver.

That's for sure.

Used to being taken care of.

Shoe on the other foot now.

And the shoe doesn't fit.

I can't wait til I get a car.

Everything will change when I get a car.

I'm such a teenager right now.

I can feel myself reverting.

Wanting to rebel.

Wanting to get out of the house and sneak off with some boy.

Not that there are any boys to sneak off with.

Or God, any time I could sneak off with a boy.

A man.

I can't sneak off with boys anymore.

That's illegal.

"Dear sirs of the online dating world, I am available between the hours of 11pm and 5am, please throw a pebble at my window and I will let you up. I don't want to disturb my father, the General, and my mother, who is a deep-fried sparrow of woman. PS. I have a husband in LA, but we're separated."

I don't even want to know what kind of responses I would get.

She hears something.

Oh, Dad's up. I should get dressed.

Maybe if I beat him downstairs I can make the coffee first.

Diana stands.

*General Kirkland enters, hands Diana a thermos.
They drive to work together. Silence, then.*

GENERAL

How's your bed?

DIANA

It's fine.

GENERAL

Not too soft?

DIANA

I think it's fine.

GENERAL

It's a 35-year old mattress.

DIANA

No it's not.

GENERAL

I think so.

DIANA

I'm old.

General looks at her.

GENERAL

What does that make me?

Older.	DIANA
You like the men?	GENERAL
At the hospital? Yeah, they're fine.	DIANA
They give you any sass?	GENERAL
Not really.	DIANA
You can always throw my name around.	GENERAL
No thank you.	DIANA
Gotta show muscle with those guys.	GENERAL
That's not really my style.	DIANA
Doesn't matter. That's what works.	GENERAL
Ok.	DIANA
Forget what you learned in California.	GENERAL
Everything?	DIANA
Don't be smart?	GENERAL
What should I be?	DIANA

Never mind. GENERAL

Silence.

How're you holding up with Mom? DIANA

Fine. GENERAL

Are you sure? DIANA

Yes. GENERAL

I think she'll be ok. Rehab will be good. New meds. DIANA

Carmen's been a godsend. GENERAL

She seems very patient. DIANA

She lived with the Fowlers. When Jane was sick. GENERAL

Oh, how's Jane? DIANA

She died. GENERAL

Oh. DIANA

Pneumonia, broken hip. Etc. GENERAL

That's too bad. I liked her. DIANA

She was very nice to you when you were young. GENERAL

DIANA

Yeah, she was.

Silence. They have arrived at Walter Reed.

GENERAL

Ok, have a nice day.

DIANA

Thanks for the ride.

GENERAL

I'm playing squash with Whitson this afternoon. I'll ask him about the Beemer.
Won't offer anything above 20.

DIANA

20 thousand dollars?

GENERAL

Is that too high?

DIANA

Yeah, Dad, that's too high.

GENERAL

Ok, I'll see what I can do.

DIANA

I'll call you when I'm done.

GENERAL

All right.

DIANA

Have a nice day. (*A beat.*) Don't beat Whitson.

GENERAL

So we get a lower price on the Beemer?

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

I'll see what I can do. I'm in better shape than he is.

DIANA

I'm sure you are.

Diana exits the car.

Isaacson's office. Diana knocks on the doorframe. He waves her in.

DIANA

Hi. Do you have a minute?

ISAACSON

I do.

A moment.

ISAACSON

How's your office?

DIANA

It's fine.

ISAACSON

A little bare bones?

DIANA

It's ok. I can get a plant.

She gestures at his plants.

ISAACSON

All my plants are fake.

DIANA

They look great.

ISAACSON

They do, don't they? You'd never know.

A moment.

ISAACSON

How's your mother doing?

DIANA

Oh. She's doing ok. Thanks.

ISAACSON

Good.

DIANA

She's home, we have an aide helping out during the day. So now we just wait and see how rehab goes.

ISAACSON

It's all we can do sometimes.

DIANA

It is.

ISAACSON

And it's nice to have a doctor in the family. Though it's not always nice to *be* the doctor in the family.

DIANA

That's the truth.

ISAACSON

They should teach that in medical school.

DIANA

How to provide medical advice to family members?

ISAACSON

And how to decline providing medical advice to friends and family.

DIANA

Might be more effective as a conference.

ISAACSON

Yes. You're probably right.

DIANA

Talk to the Medicine folks.

ISAACSON

Yeah, get them involved, they're never busy.

DIANA

Nope.

A moment.

DIANA

I have a couple questions about some files I was looking through last night.

ISAACSON

Ok. Hopefully I have some answers.

DIANA

These patients, Gonzalez's patients, it looks like a lot of them received unnecessary surgeries. Surgery that might have impeded recovery.

ISAACSON

Like what?

DIANA

Surgeries to remove shrapnel, some of which have led to infections, further pain and then subsequent surgeries.

ISAACSON

And these are surgeries that I signed off on.

DIANA

Yes, sir.

ISAACSON

And, in your mind, because the outcomes haven't been ideal, the surgeries are unnecessary?

DIANA

Ideal isn't the word I would use in this situation.

ISAACSON

So you're questioning Gonzalez's judgment? Or...

DIANA

No. I don't think it's a matter of judgment. I think it's a matter of philosophy. I'm curious about the department's philosophy on this.

ISAACSON

Curious.

DIANA

I'll put it another way. The way I was trained, the way I came to practice surgery at UCLA, we didn't operate if we didn't think it was necessary. Except in situations where the patient was really adamant. And we always discussed treatment options, pros and cons, non-surgical possibilities. So, when I look at these files. When I see these medical histories? These guys in and out of the OR for months on end? My antenna goes up. And I want to know if my philosophy is different from the one here.

ISAACSON

It is.

She looks at him.

ISAACSON

Our patients receive surgery deemed most effective for their injuries.

DIANA

By whom?

ISAACSON

By surgeons operating on soldiers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan for the past 8 years.

DIANA

So you do the operations, you crunch the numbers and you repeat?

ISAACSON

If a certain surgery has the best rate of success for a given injury, why would we waste time deliberating how to treat someone with that injury?

DIANA

Because they might not want to live with the possible side effects. Because they might opt for something else if given the choice.

ISAACSON

They don't get the choice.

DIANA

Why not?

ISAACSON

They're soldiers. They're trained not to make decisions above rank.

DIANA

But they have to live with the outcomes.

ISAACSON

They do, but how can we expect them to make the right call if they don't have all the information?

DIANA

You give them the information.

ISAACSON

In a perfect world, every patient knows as much as we do and they make the decisions for us?

DIANA

No, in a perfect world we bring our expertise and they bring their preferences and needs and we come to a decision based on that.

ISAACSON

What about the preferences and the needs of the US Army?

DIANA

Are they more important?

ISAACSON

You've been here a couple weeks?

DIANA

Yes.

ISAACSON

I appreciate your dedication to our patients and the way they've been treated.

DIANA

Thank you.

ISAACSON

But if you're questioning the philosophy of the department already I can't help but think you won't stay here very long.

DIANA

There's this one patient. Ishmael Blanco. Specialist Blanco.

ISAACSON

Ishmael?

DIANA

Yeah.

ISAACSON

Who names a kid Ishmael?

DIANA

A religion professor and a book nerd.

ISAACSON

Ok.

DIANA

Specialist Blanco has had surgery three times since he sustained an injury in an IED explosion. The medical file I was given was incomplete, it didn't include his surgery at Landstuhl and the most recent surgery he received has left him with an infection that could have been avoided. So he's had these surgeries, at least one of which was unnecessary, in my opinion, and he's in pain, he expects to get a ton of benzos to ease the pain, because that's what he got last time and then I go to the next room and the guy in there has a similar issue.

ISAACSON

So what do you suggest we do?

DIANA

Give our patients the information to make an informed decision.

ISAACSON

Ok, how?

DIANA

We take the time to educate them—

ISAACSON

Who does?

DIANA

We do, the nurses do, the—

ISAACSON

With what time? With what money?

DIANA

If you let me try.

ISAACSON

You know why you're here, right?

DIANA

To treat patients at Walter Reed before everyone relocates to Bethesda.

ISAACSON

You're here because the Chief of Staff and your father go back 40 years.

DIANA

Sir, with all due respect, I'm here after 20 years of medical training and practice at one of the best orthopedics program in the country. My father's relationship with Colonel Deerborn has little to do with my ability to treat patients here.

But it does matter. To you and to me.

ISAACSON

Meaning?

DIANA

Rank matters, Dr. Kirkland.

ISAACSON

Yes, Colonel. I know that.

DIANA

This conversation suggests otherwise.

ISAACSON

If I took the time to put together some information on what I've found, on the way that patients have been mistreated, would you take it seriously?

DIANA

I would look at it.

ISAACSON

And I could work with my patients giving them the information they need to have constructive conversations about treatment?

DIANA

How smart is this Ishmael kid?

ISAACSON

Smart.

DIANA

Ok, you can start with Ishmael. Don't talk to him about the surgeries he's already had. Just talk to him about what he could do next.

ISAACSON

And the others?

DIANA

How many others?

ISAACSON

About 15.

DIANA

ISAACSON
You think you have time for that?

DIANA
I don't know.

ISAACSON
Start with Ishmael.

DIANA
Fine.

ISAACSON
And then we can talk further when you've been here a little longer.

DIANA
Alright. Thank you.

ISAACSON
Here. Why don't you take one of these?

He hands her one of his fake plants.

DIANA
Thanks.

ISAACSON
Saves you the trouble.

DIANA
Yeah.

She exits with the fake plant.

The Kirkland living room. Mary sits alone, chamber music plays. Mary's eyes are closed.

General Kirkland and Diana enter.

DIANA
Hi Mom.

MARY
Hello.

DIANA
Did you leave this on for her?

It calms her down. GENERAL

Where's Carmen? DIANA

She went home, I guess. GENERAL

So Mom's alone? DIANA

Jason's here. GENERAL

But if something happened to Mom. DIANA

Nothing's going to happen. She was good today. GENERAL

Ok... DIANA

Carmen has kids at home, we don't like to keep her too late. GENERAL

I know. This is why I need a car. So you can stay home and not worry about leaving Mom alone. DIANA

I'm not worried about leaving Mom alone. You are. GENERAL

I'm not worried, I just— DIANA

I was gone for 15 minutes. GENERAL

Ok. Never mind. How was your squash game? DIANA

Good. GENERAL

Did you let Whitson win?

DIANA

I didn't have to.

GENERAL

Why not?

DIANA

He suggested 10k without asking me what I thought was fair. And then I got him down to 9.

GENERAL

That's wonderful.

DIANA

I invited them over for dinner next Saturday. They'll drive it over then.

GENERAL

A dinner party?

DIANA

An informal dinner with old friends is not a dinner party.

GENERAL

Has anyone come by since Mom's been home?

DIANA

No, who would come by?

GENERAL

Friends.

DIANA

Why?

GENERAL

To spend time with her.

DIANA

Mary opens her eyes.

I'm right here.

MARY

They both look at Mary.

DIANA
Hi Mom.

MARY
I can hear what you're saying. I'm right here.

DIANA
Would you like to have dinner with the Whitsons next Saturday?

MARY
The Whitsons? Who are the Whitsons?

GENERAL
You know the Whitsons, hun.

MARY
I do?

GENERAL
We've known Bob for 30 years.

MARY
Ok. His wife is the shrewish one?

GENERAL
His wife can be a little abrasive.

MARY
That's what I thought.

GENERAL
I think it'd be nice to have them over.

MARY
Whatever.

GENERAL
Bob is going to give his car to Diana.

MARY
That's nice of him.

DIANA
He's selling it, he's not giving it to me.

Darling, have you eaten?	MARY
I haven't.	DIANA
Go get yourself some food. You're so skinny.	MARY
Oh, I'm, this is my usual size.	DIANA
You look very skinny.	MARY
I think you look fine.	GENERAL
Thanks.	DIANA
She's too skinny.	MARY
I'll get some food. You want anything?	DIANA
No thank you.	GENERAL
Mom?	DIANA
<i>Mary doesn't respond.</i>	
Mary, do you want anything from the kitchen?	GENERAL
No thank you.	MARY
Did you take your pills yet?	DIANA
Carmen gave them to me.	MARY

Great.

DIANA

Diana exits.

Is she living here?

MARY

You know she is.

GENERAL

No I don't. If I did I wouldn't have asked.

MARY

She's here to help out.

GENERAL

I don't like having her here.

MARY

What?

GENERAL

I don't trust her.

MARY

She's our daughter. She's here to help you recover.

GENERAL

Nevermind.

MARY

Diana is a doctor.

GENERAL

Ok.

MARY

She moved here from Los Angeles.

GENERAL

Los Angeles.

MARY

You had a stroke and then you had another... episode.

GENERAL

I know. MARY

And Diana is here to be with you. GENERAL

That's very nice of her. MARY

It is. GENERAL

But I don't want her here. MARY

Why not? GENERAL

I don't know. MARY

She's living here. GENERAL

She can find somewhere else. MARY

No she can't. GENERAL

She can. MARY

Diana comes back in with a plate of food. She lingers.

Mary. You don't have a say in this. GENERAL

I don't want her here. MARY

I don't care. We need her. GENERAL

I don't want her. MARY

Diana walks a bit further into the room.

It's better if you heat it up. GENERAL

I'm too hungry. DIANA

Because you're too skinny. MARY

Thanks Mom. DIANA

Let me heat it up for you. GENERAL

I'm fine! DIANA

Suit yourself. GENERAL

So, Mom, do you like having Carmen around? DIANA

I love Carmen. MARY

That's great. DIANA

So skinny. MARY
(to General Kirkland)

Mom. DIANA

No man will ever want to marry you if you're so skinny. MARY

I'm... DIANA

Diana's already married. GENERAL

That's right.

MARY

Well, we're separated.

DIANA

Because you got too skinny. If a man has nothing to hold onto, he won't hold onto you for much longer. Look at me.

MARY

You look great.

DIANA

I know.

MARY

Mary glares at Diana.

Maybe you should go upstairs.

GENERAL

What?

DIANA

Your mother is tired.

GENERAL

I'm not tired. I just don't want this woman in our house.

MARY

Diana looks at Mary. Looks at her father.

Ok. I'll go upstairs.

DIANA

I want her out of here by the morning.

MARY

Mary, we're not kicking her out of the house. She's here to help you.

GENERAL

I don't want her help.

MARY

Mary!

GENERAL

Diana pulls her father aside.

DIANA

Dad, it's fine. I'll go upstairs. She'll feel better in the morning.

GENERAL

Maybe.

DIANA

She's had a long day. This is totally normal.

GENERAL

It's not normal. None of this is normal, Diana.

DIANA

She's adjusting to the new meds. Her brain's in a weird place.

GENERAL

You know you're welcome here.

DIANA

Of course I do.

GENERAL

Ok.

DIANA

5:45 tomorrow?

GENERAL

It's a date.

Diana exits with her plate of food.

Mary looks at the General.

MARY

If I see her here tomorrow, you'll be sorry.

GENERAL

Mary. You don't know what you're saying.

MARY

You think I've been blind all these years to what you're doing.

What are you talking about?

GENERAL

I know about your affairs.

MARY

Mary. Your brain chemistry is—

GENERAL

Wayne Kirkland. Don't try to pin this on me. I know about Jane. And Sherry.

MARY

General Kirkland looks at her, a little stunned.

MARY

I was ok with it. I was. You had your power and needed your ego stroked. And I wasn't enough. I knew that then. And I let you do it. I let you carry on with the wives of your friends. With my friends.

GENERAL

Mary, you're sick. You're tired. You're not thinking straight. We can talk again in the morning when you're feeling better.

MARY

I feel fine.

GENERAL

Let's get you upstairs.

MARY

I'd rather stay down here.

GENERAL

I can't leave you down here.

MARY

Why not?

GENERAL

Because you can't take care of yourself. You barely know who you are, you don't know where you are. You're dependent on me and Diana.

MARY

I am Mary Kirkland. I was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. I have lived in this house in Chevy Chase, Maryland for thirty years. You are my husband Wayne. I have two daughters Diana and Teresa. I am dependent on no one.

GENERAL

Mary...

General Kirkland extends his hand to her, tries to calm her.

MARY

Take your hands off of me.

GENERAL

Ok. Fine. I'll go upstairs. Let me know if you need anything.

MARY

I'm sure I won't.

General Kirkland exits. The music continues to play.

Mary closes her eyes.

Diana in her room.

DIANA

Change is hard.

But necessary.

The changes that an institution like Walter Reed require to bring its practices into the 21st century are many.

One such change that would alleviate the relationship between patient and doctor would be the implementation of shared decision making.

Rather than treating certain medical treatments as a given, as an order, we would do better to engage with our patients to discuss their independent needs.

I believe this would radically change the satisfaction of patients and doctors.

It will not be easy.

It will not be without its complications.

The following proposal indicates three actions we can set in place now to work towards this. I strongly suggest that the board approve their implementation.

A hospital room at Walter Reed. Ishmael enters, on crutches. He sits down. He looks around. Diana enters.

DIANA

Good morning!

ISHMAEL

Hey doc.

DIANA
How're you doing?

ISHMAEL
Ok. Foot still hurts. Started season three of The Wire.

DIANA
Is your pain worse?

ISHMAEL
It's about the same.

DIANA
Ok.

ISHMAEL
I did the acupuncture.

DIANA
How was that?

ISHMAEL
It was fine.

DIANA
Did you pass out?

ISHMAEL
Nah.

DIANA
Did you feel better afterwards?

ISHMAEL
I have no idea. I can't tell if I was just distracted by all the tiny needles or if it was actually working.

DIANA
Maybe that's ok.

ISHMAEL
Doesn't seem very scientific.

DIANA
But it didn't make anything worse.

ISHMAEL
That's right.

DIANA
Would you be interested in doing it again?

ISHMAEL
Maybe.

DIANA
And how's the writing going?

ISHMAEL
It's ok!

DIANA
Have you discovered anything?

ISHMAEL
Like what?

DIANA
Have you processed anything differently by writing about it?

ISHMAEL
Like, my feelings?

DIANA
Sure.

ISHMAEL
I've been writing about my parents.

DIANA
And how's that?

ISHMAEL
It's good. (*a pause*) Do you want me to talk about it?

DIANA
Only if you want to.

ISHMAEL
I was angry at first. Angry with them. Not like I blamed them for anything, but maybe I did. Maybe I thought if they had been more supportive or something I wouldn't be here. But I guess I'm trying to move past that now. I don't like being angry, you know?

DIANA
That all sounds really good.

A moment.

ISHMAEL
How's your writing going?

DIANA
It's good. I've also been writing about my parents.

ISHMAEL
Funny.

DIANA
I'm glad you suggested it.

ISHMAEL
Good.

DIANA
I have a question. Maybe more like an idea.

ISHMAEL
Ok.

DIANA
I've been thinking about your foot. About your time here and I'm hoping there's a way to help you out.

ISHMAEL
Ok?

DIANA
When you were operated on before what kind of conversations did Gonzalez and other surgeons have with you?

ISHMAEL
Conversations?

DIANA
Yeah, did Gonzalez speak with you about the outcomes and the risks of the surgeries beforehand?

ISHMAEL
I don't really remember.

DIANA

That sounds like a no.

ISHMAEL

I mean, they probably told me what the plan was, you know?

DIANA

But they didn't talk to you about what you wanted.

ISHMAEL

Nope. Not that I can recall.

DIANA

Alright. Well, with that in mind, I would like to talk with you about what treatments might make sense going forward.

ISHMAEL

Like acupuncture?

DIANA

No. Other surgical options.

ISHMAEL

More surgery?

DIANA

If the pain in your foot continues at this level, there are a few things that you could consider that might make it better. But they require some research and thought and conversations between the two of us about what's best for you moving forward.

ISHMAEL

Ok.

DIANA

From my understanding the surgeries you received were performed with the hope that you could return to the field once you finished rehabbing?

ISHMAEL

Yes.

DIANA

So you need to think about whether that's something you want.

ISHMAEL

Going back?

DIANA

Yes.

ISHMAEL

I mean do I have a choice?

DIANA

You should. I think you should.

A moment.

DIANA

The way your foot is now, it could go either way. You're otherwise healthy. And if in the next few weeks we got your pain down to a 2—you'd be fit for service. But if that doesn't happen, we have a few decisions to make.

ISHMAEL

So you want me to decide whether I want to go back to Afghanistan. How much time are you giving me to make this decision?

DIANA

We need to wait a bit on your recovery. A few weeks? In these circumstances I would say go with your gut. And then think about it for a bit. And then check in with your gut again.

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

Keep writing in the mornings. You might learn some things from what you end up writing. Things change when they go from your brain to your hand to the page. Like with your parents.

ISHMAEL

I guess they do.

Ishmael thinks for a bit.

ISHMAEL

You doing this with your other patients?

DIANA

I'm trying it with you first.

ISHMAEL
I'm special or something?

DIANA
You're smart. You're engaged. You're responsive. I'm... in all honesty, I'm trying to change the culture here.

ISHMAEL
Ha! Good luck.

DIANA
I know.

ISHMAEL
So you and I are taking on the VA?

DIANA
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

ISHMAEL
You seen that movie?

DIANA
Not in awhile.

ISHMAEL
You seen the end?

A moment.

DIANA
Ok, so that's a bad metaphor.

Ishmael laughs.

ISHMAEL
I like this.

DIANA
Good.

ISHMAEL
So you want me to think about what I want to do with the rest of my life and then we'll talk about surgery?

DIANA
Sounds easy, right?

ISHMAEL
Yeah. Between PT and acupuncture, I got plenty of time to think about the rest of my life.

DIANA
Let's talk again in 10 days or so?

ISHMAEL
Ok.

DIANA
And then I can give you some surgical and non-surgical options.

ISHMAEL
And if my foot just gets better?

DIANA
Then at least you'll have a better idea of what you want to do next.

ISHMAEL
Yeah.

DIANA
College? A job? A move?

ISHMAEL
Yeah.

DIANA
If you could wave a magic wand, what would you do?

ISHMAEL
You asking me now?

DIANA
Do you have an answer now?

ISHMAEL
I don't know. Make movies?

DIANA
Ok! That's something.

ISHMAEL
It's not very practical.

It doesn't matter.

DIANA

You think I could make movies?

ISHMAEL

Why not?

DIANA

I wouldn't know where to start.

ISHMAEL

So you learn. You made those movies in high school.

DIANA

Yeah, but that was stupid shit.

ISHMAEL

You have to start somewhere. Remember when you were in basic training?

DIANA

Don't remind me.

ISHMAEL

Think about how much you've learned since then.

DIANA

Yeah. But I'm old now.

ISHMAEL

Diana looks at him.

DIANA

You're 27?

ISHMAEL

Uh huh.

DIANA

You're not old.

ISHMAEL

I feel like it.

DIANA

You have a whole life ahead of you.

ISHMAEL

I guess.

DIANA

You do. I want you to leave here knowing that you have so much in front of you. Whether you see that or not. You do.

ISHMAEL

Doesn't feel like it right now.

DIANA

Why?

ISHMAEL

You serious?

DIANA

I am.

ISHMAEL

Let's see. Because I can barely walk, because I did three tours in Afghanistan. That shit will age you. Will depress you. Make you think life isn't really all it's cracked up to be. That it could have been me instead of the translator. Better dead than broken.

DIANA

Are you talking to someone about this?

ISHMAEL

I'm talking to you.

DIANA

Are you talking to a counselor?

ISHMAEL

It doesn't seem that important.

DIANA

It doesn't?

ISHMAEL

We're all a little suicidal in here.

DIANA

That's not true.

ISHMAEL
It kind of is.

DIANA
Have you been up to the Fishbowl?

ISHMAEL
I pass it when I go to PT.

DIANA
You see those amputees pushing through their PT and you tell me that everyone here is suicidal?

ISHMAEL
Those guys are crazy.

DIANA
What's crazy about them?

ISHMAEL
You got no legs and you're doing PT so you can go back to Afghanistan with some prosthetics? That's some crazy shit.

DIANA
I don't know. I think it's inspiring.

ISHMAEL
That they have some vendetta against the guy who killed their friend. Who took their legs?

DIANA
It's better than lying in bed feeling sorry for yourself.

ISHMAEL
You think that's what I'm doing?

DIANA
No.

ISHMAEL
You sure?

DIANA
If going back to Afghanistan doesn't motivate you. Then you need to think about what does.

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

And maybe it would be helpful to talk to a counselor here before we meet next.

ISHMAEL

Sure. I mean, they're a little busy, but yeah.

DIANA

We're taking on the system, remember?

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

Head in the game.

ISHMAEL

Ok.

DIANA

We good?

ISHMAEL

We're good.

DIANA

Ok, I'll see you soon.

ISHMAEL

I'll be a new man. Promise.

DIANA

You don't need to be a new man. Just put some thought in what you'd like for yourself.

Ishmael nods.

DIANA

See you around.

ISHMAEL

See ya.

Diana waves as she exits. A nurse comes in to help Ishmael off.

Diana's bedroom. Morning.

DIANA

I got a car yesterday
I guess that's exciting.
The Whitsons came over for dinner and brought this Beemer. 9 grand later, it's mine.
It's kinda great.
I mean, it's a little flashy and weird that I have a Beemer now, but I like it.
I think in some weird way it suits me.
Never thought I would think or say that.
Of course I haven't driven it yet because we drank too much with dinner.
The Whitsons are hilarious.
They're like this parody of DC high society.
Two martinis for Bob before dinner.
A bottle of white for Jeanine.
They go through all the stages.
Quiet, chatty, overly chatty, downright nosy.
And then they disappear.
But hey, I got a car.
Mom can't drink, which kills her, and is like a zombie at the table all night.
Dad's been referring to Terry as "the screenwriter" and keeps asking if we're going to get back together.
Is it unfair to say that he doesn't register in my life at all right now?
It's true. So maybe it doesn't matter if it's unfair.
I guess that's something to learn from the separation.
That we are totally capable of living apart.
Perhaps even happier.
Or at least I am.
I have no idea how he's doing.
He wouldn't tell me one way or the other.
It feels like an eternity.
Time at the hospital feels like nothing.
But time at home, even though I feel like I'm barely here, feels like forever.
Mom apparently hates me.
And doesn't want me living in the house.
The brain can be so weird.
Every time I think I have her figured out, she throws me for another loop.
I'm so glad I just cut into limbs for a living.
Less nuance.

Slowly, Mary enters. Diana looks at her. Mary looks a little startled.

Hey Mom. DIANA

Can I come in? MARY

Of course. DIANA

Am I interrupting anything? MARY

No, you're fine. DIANA

How are you? MARY

I'm good. How are you? DIANA

I feel good. You're usually not in here this late. MARY

Yeah, it's Sunday. I'm not working today. DIANA

Oh. Of course. How's work going? MARY

It's good. DIANA

Do you miss LA? MARY

A little bit. DIANA

And probably a little strange to be back here after all those years in the sun. MARY

Yeah. DIANA

Diana doesn't quite know what's happening.

MARY

What are you looking at?

DIANA

Last night you didn't really know who I was. And today, you seem to know.

MARY

I've been confused recently.

DIANA

I know.

MARY

Those pills were muddling my brain.

DIANA

I don't think it was the pills, Mom.

MARY

I started taking the pills and I got more confused.

DIANA

Mom, you had a stroke and it affected your brain chemistry and the pills are trying to counteract that. The pills are helping.

MARY

The pills are not helping.

DIANA

I know you don't think they are, but they're the best treatment for you right now.

MARY

Says who?

DIANA

All the doctors who have been taking care of you.

A moment.

MARY

Do you mind if I sit?

DIANA

No. That's fine.

MARY

I get so tired.

Mary sits next to Diana. They lean into one another a little.

	DIANA
Can I get you anything?	
	MARY
No, I'm alright.	
	DIANA
I missed you. When I was in LA.	
	MARY
You did?	
	DIANA
When Dad called I thought, "this is what you get for not going home enough. For not being present"	
	MARY
You have your own life.	
	DIANA
Yeah.	
	MARY
A family of your own.	
	DIANA
I wouldn't go that far.	
	MARY
You have a husband.	
	DIANA
Yeah, we'll see how long that lasts.	
	MARY
Because you're here?	
	DIANA
It was a long time coming. We were rarely happy with one another.	
	MARY
I think happiness is overrated in marriage.	

What?
DIANA

Your father and I were rarely happy. Look at us.
MARY

Yeah...
DIANA

We're still here.
MARY

You are. Though, at what cost.
DIANA

Hm. Do you remember when I was in the hospital? When you were in high school?
MARY

Uh huh.
DIANA

I don't think we ever talked about it.
MARY

No. Teresa and I stayed with the Fowlers for a couple weeks and then you were back. And we never said anything.
DIANA

I was at St. Elizabeth's.
MARY

Ok.
DIANA

Your father had done something. Or maybe it didn't even have anything to do with your father. I just remember that I knew something wasn't right. It wasn't safe for me to be home with the two of you. He was in Kuwait or something.
MARY

Yeah, Kuwait.
DIANA

And I hadn't heard from him in a while and I went on this bender?
MARY

DIANA

Ok.

MARY

So I checked myself into St. Elizabeth's and told Jane to take care of you guys until I was better.

DIANA

Yeah.

MARY

When I came home I wanted to tell you, but I didn't know what to say. So I didn't say anything. And I know it's been years, but I wanted to tell you. Now. So you know.

DIANA

I already knew.

MARY

You did?

DIANA

Dad told me about it when I was in college.

MARY

Told you about what?

DIANA

That you're bipolar. Is that—

MARY

When?

DIANA

I don't know, it was sophomore year? I called asking for you and you weren't there. I had this stupid boy problem and didn't want to talk to him about it, but he insisted. He was actually surprisingly helpful. With boy stuff. Very straightforward.

But then he told me about St. Elizabeth's. And how you were having a manic episode and needed to stay there for awhile. And that this was something that happened to you occasionally. And it was a chemical thing and it was all going to be ok. And I was taking this abnormal psych class at the time because I thought that maybe I was interested in psychiatry. But after talking to him I decided that maybe that wasn't a great idea. That maybe I was going to get what you had. And that it would be weird to be a shrink with major psychiatric problems. But I did a bunch of research. Wrote a paper about it.

Mary stares at Diana.

MARY

He told you?

DIANA

Yeah.

MARY

And you never said anything?

DIANA

Why would I? You didn't.

MARY

You didn't have any questions?

DIANA

I researched it all semester and then I became a doctor. So yeah, I had questions.

MARY

Well.

DIANA

I figured if you didn't want to talk about it, I would learn about it in other ways.

Silence. Mary is visibly upset. Diana takes Mary's hand.

DIANA

I'm glad you told me. Even if it took 20 years.

A moment between them.

MARY

I'm not ashamed.

DIANA

That's good. You shouldn't be.

MARY

But it's—it's been hard. This time around. This one has been harder.

DIANA

I know. That's why I'm here.

MARY

Yes. And I appreciate that. Thank you. I—I want you to know that this me talking. This is my right mind. I haven't been in my right mind a lot. The meds make me fuzzy. Confused. But, I want you to know that I love you. I love that you came to live with us again, you left your marriage for me.

DIANA

Well—

MARY

You're such a beautiful, smart, powerful woman.

DIANA

Mom.

MARY

You are. And I just am so proud of everything that you've done. You've done so many things that I never could have done. Every time you had a setback, you would bounce back higher, you never let disappointment stop you. I admire you for that.

DIANA

Thank you.

MARY

I wish I could be more like you.

Mary kisses Diana's hand. A knock on the door.

Thank god.

DIANA

Yeah?

GENERAL

Is your mother in here?

DIANA

She is.

He pokes his head in. He has a mug of coffee for Diana.

GENERAL

Good morning, Mary.

MARY

Good morning.

GENERAL

How are you doing?

Mary drops Diana's hand.

MARY

You told Diana about St. Elizabeth's twenty years ago and never told me?

GENERAL

Did I?

DIANA

You did.

GENERAL

I suppose I thought it would be useful for her to know.

MARY

You didn't ask me.

GENERAL

You were in a mental hospital and couldn't see visitors. What was I supposed to say?

MARY

You could have told her that I was travelling. Or at the hairdresser.

GENERAL

For four weeks?

MARY

It wasn't your information to tell.

GENERAL
(to Diana)

Did we ever talk about it again?

DIANA

Ten years later, the next time Mom was in the hospital. I was doing my residency?

GENERAL

That's right.

Mary gets up to leave.

Mom, where are you going?
DIANA

I have lived with this secret for 40 years and it's not a secret.
MARY

Isn't that better?
DIANA

No. It's not.
MARY

I'm sorry.
DIANA

I'm not angry.
MARY

Ok.
DIANA

I'm going to get some coffee.
MARY

Should you be having coffee?
DIANA

A cup of coffee isn't going to kill me, Diana.
MARY

Mary exits.

I love your mother.
GENERAL

I know.
DIANA

But she has been a difficult woman to be married to. And this does not make it easier.
GENERAL

Yeah.
DIANA

I never know what's real and what isn't.
GENERAL

DIANA
Isn't it all real?

GENERAL
I don't know what to believe. Is it all her?

DIANA
Yes.

GENERAL
I suppose it is.

DIANA
That's what's so hard. The hard parts, the mean parts, the complicated parts, the depressed parts. They're all her. But so is the adoration, the intelligence, the glee. It's all there.

GENERAL
Do you want to go for a drive? Take the Beemer for a spin?

DIANA
Sure.

GENERAL
It'd be a nice day to go to Antietam.

DIANA
What?

GENERAL
The *Post* says they're doing a whole Civil War medicine weekend. Might be fun.

DIANA
I'm not a kid.

GENERAL
When was the last time you went?

DIANA
Junior year. AP US History field trip.

GENERAL
Come on. We'll break in the new car.

DIANA
Antietam?

Carmen can deal with Mom. GENERAL

We could bring her. DIANA

Your mother hates the Civil War. GENERAL

Oh. Yeah. Straws and the Civil War. DIANA

That Southron blood runs deep. And she thinks there are ghosts. GENERAL

There are ghosts. DIANA

Battlefields aren't haunted. They're just fortified with blood. GENERAL

Diana doesn't know how to respond to that.

Ok—let me get dressed. DIANA

Take your time. GENERAL

Thanks for the coffee. DIANA

I'm glad you're home. GENERAL

I know. DIANA

I'm proud of you. You know that? GENERAL

Mom just said that... DIANA

What you're doing isn't easy. GENERAL

DIANA

What I'm doing?

GENERAL

Coming home. Working with the guys at Walter Reed. You didn't have to do any of this. So I'm proud of you.

DIANA

I'm concerned that retirement has made you soft.

GENERAL

Hey, don't worry about me, worry about your mother.

He goes to the door.

DIANA

I'll be down in half an hour.

He exits.

Antietam. Isaacson stands in front of a sign that says The Bloody Cornfield. He holds a map. He's a little sweaty. He's been walking a lot. Diana enters, the General a little behind.

DIANA

Oh...

GENERAL

What?

DIANA

That's my boss.

GENERAL

Go say hi.

DIANA

Yeah. Ok.

Diana pulls herself up. She walks over to Isaacson.

DIANA

Colonel Isaacson, hi!

Isaacson sees Diana. He smiles. He sees General Kirkland.

ISAACSON
Please, call me Jared.

DIANA
Jared. This is my dad.

GENERAL
Wayne Kirkland. Pleasure to meet you.

Does Isaacson salute here?

ISAACSON
Jared Isaacson. I've had the pleasure of working with your daughter for the past few weeks.

GENERAL
Sounds like it's all going well.

ISAACSON
It is. Diana is a wonderful addition to the department. She's bringing some exciting ideas out from California. Really trying to shake things up. Just submitted her proposal to the board.

DIANA
Well... I wouldn't—

ISAACSON
You know how Walter Reed is... Caught somewhere between this battlefield and Vietnam.

GENERAL
I wouldn't say that.

ISAACSON
Were you at the field hospital demonstration?

DIANA
We just missed it.

ISAACSON
People think they didn't use anesthesia back then. When people think about the Civil War they think about *Dances with Wolves* or something. They think the men just drank some whiskey and gritted their teeth. But of course they used

chloroform the majority of the time. The war was brutal but the treatment was as good as it could possibly be. Given the circumstances.

Silence.

ISAACSON
How's your mother doing?

DIANA
She's ok. She doesn't like Antietam.

GENERAL
She's from Richmond.

ISAACSON
I see.

DIANA
But rehab is going well so far.

ISAACSON
Good.

DIANA
I—I don't want to keep you from—

ISAACSON
I was just catching my breath. Thought I would walk around the Bloody Cornfield and it's always bigger than I remember. Or I'm getting older. But I recommend it. If you haven't done it.

GENERAL
You want to?

DIANA
Maybe...

ISAACSON
You know the story, right?

DIANA
I don't think I remember it.

GENERAL
You don't remember it?

DIANA

No—I don't remember every detail from the Battle of Antietam.

GENERAL

(to Isaacson)

We skipped the video this time around. I've seen it too many times.

ISAACSON

But James Earl Jones!

The General turns to Diana.

GENERAL

So it's dawn on September 27th and on this side of the cornfield, the Georgia men are sitting, waiting. Union troops make their way through the cornfield and all of a sudden.

ISAACSON

(interrupting)

Shots fired, cannons, muskets, whatever, the guys in the cornfield are stranded. But they keep advancing. Falling, advancing. And the Rebels get in there and they start falling and advancing.

GENERAL

And after a few hours, 10,000 men are dead in this cornfield alone. All at close range. Men just trying to stay alive. Keep their friends alive. Some real fight or flight shit happened here.

They look at the cornfield.

ISAACSON

Fucking mess.

DIANA

Yeah.

ISAACSON

You want to talk about PTSD? Think about the bloody cornfield. The guys who survived that.

A moment.

GENERAL

You want to walk around it?

DIANA

Sure...

GENERAL

See some ghosts.

DIANA

You don't believe in ghosts.

ISAACSON

You gotta believe in something when you're here.

The sound of a gust of wind through the corn.

GENERAL

Ghosts.

DIANA

Dad.

General Kirkland smiles.

ISAACSON

You two enjoy your walk. Diana, I'll see you on Monday.

DIANA

Enjoy the rest of your weekend.

ISAACSON

You too.

Isaacson exits.

GENERAL

Funny that he was here.

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

What are these California changes you're bringing to the hospital?

DIANA

I'm trying to get them to employ a more patient-centered approach.

GENERAL

To what?

Treating soldiers.

DIANA

Instead of what?

GENERAL

Receiving orders.

DIANA

I see.

GENERAL

DIANA

So right now, the goal is to get these guys back to the front as quickly as possible. Right? And that means that they're getting surgeries that are considered most likely to be effective, but what if they don't want to go back to the front? What if they have other plans or other priorities? At the moment, that doesn't matter. And this one doctor who was there before me did all these surgeries that have been totally ineffective because they are for "the average soldier". And we all know there's no such thing.

GENERAL

And Isaacson is ok with that?

DIANA

Yes and no. The hospital's kind of crazy at the moment.

GENERAL

You should probably tread lightly with this.

DIANA

I know.

GENERAL

It's a massive change to the system.

DIANA

Yeah, but it's important.

GENERAL

Of course it is. But it's going to be hard.

DIANA

I think I can handle it.

GENERAL

Diana. You can't go up against the VA single-handedly.

DIANA

That's not what I'm doing.

GENERAL

It is.

DIANA

I'm suggesting that we change some things.

GENERAL

You're suggesting that hierarchy be displaced. In an institution built on hierarchy.

DIANA

Once the soldiers are patients, they should be treated like patients at any other hospital. With their best interests in mind.

GENERAL

But they're still employed by the US Army.

DIANA

That doesn't mean the army should tell them what kind of treatment they should receive. An *employer* should not be dictating medical treatment. This is the whole problem with the healthcare system in this country.

GENERAL

Sweetheart.

DIANA

You know it was this war, right?

Before the Civil War there was no general hospital system in this country. There certainly wasn't a VA. And then there were all these men who had fought for their country—or fought against their country. And what were we going to do with them. Let them languish. With their stumps and their deformities? And who cared for them?

Women. Women did it. Women like Clara Barton. Dorothea Dix. The women who were left. They looked at the bloody mess around them and decided to do something about it. Because all the men had fucked everything up. Sound familiar?

You two talk about the Civil War like it's romantic. But I would think you would know better.

GENERAL

It's not romanticism. It's respect. Honor. It's knowing that these men fought bravely, and sometimes not bravely. That sometimes the people in charge make mistakes that lead to all this.

DIANA

That's exactly what I'm talking about.

GENERAL

I know. I'm— [agreeing]

DIANA

I know it's not *easy* to fix this. But maybe everything is so broken, is so unfixable, that the only way to fix anything is to start over.

GENERAL

It's not that simple.

DIANA

Nothing is simple. None of this is simple. If it were simple, it wouldn't be a problem. I don't know why you're not being more supportive.

GENERAL

I know how intractable everything is. I've been in it awhile.

DIANA

But if I don't try then what's the point?

*General Kirkland looks at Diana for a moment,
choosing his words carefully.*

GENERAL

I think it's absolutely worth it to try. I just want you to keep in mind that it's a huge undertaking.

DIANA

I am.

GENERAL

And people may seem supportive at the outset and then change their stripes.

DIANA

Ok.

GENERAL

I don't want this to be too consuming.

DIANA

Because of Mom?

GENERAL

Because I love you. And I want you to be happy. And this will never make you happy.

DIANA

It will if it works.

GENERAL

Let's go for that walk.

DIANA

Yeah. Ok.

They start to walk.

GENERAL

You hear anything from the screenwriter?

DIANA

Dad.

GENERAL

What? I like him!

DIANA

No you don't. You don't call him by his name. You played Taps at our wedding.

GENERAL

That was supposed to be funny.

DIANA

Taps is for funerals.

GENERAL

Military dad humor.

DIANA

Military dad humor is terrible.

GENERAL

Come on. The Bloody Cornfield awaits.

They exit.

Three weeks later. Carmen and Mary sit in the living room.

MARY

The first woman was Geraldine. She looked a little like me, but wasn't nearly as pretty.

I was very pretty when I was younger. Bred for my looks, my mother used to say. I think it was a joke, I took it as a joke, though she and Father were a very attractive pair and otherwise didn't seem to have anything in common. The way that couples were back then, you know. They had a nice time together a few times and then he decided to pop the question. And she said yes because he had kind eyes and a good jawline. She was so young, what did she know. She knew that she was supposed to find a husband. And that this one would do.

But, Geraldine. She was a secretary, I think? One of the women who worked with Wayne. I'm no dummy, so I knew immediately. I could smell her perfume from a mile away. Nothing like mine. Spicy, woodsy. I would recognize that scent anywhere. And it made me cry when he came home and smelled like wood and spices. Because I always smelled very floral. Very demure. Very innocent. Even though at that stage I already had two daughters. There's nothing innocent about a woman who has given birth twice. Despite what she may tell you. You know. You've got two of your own. There's nothing innocent about you, is there?

She does not give Carmen time to respond.

After Geraldine was Jane. Jane was our neighbor. She's dead now. One of my best friends. The girls stayed with her when I was at St. Elizabeth's the first time. Which was after the affair started, but before I knew about it. With Jane, I couldn't be bothered to be angry. With him or with her. In fact, years later she and I would compare notes. He never loved her. He never told her he loved her. He never loved any of them.

He loved Diana more than any of us. Teresa noticed it first and because she was so young, she didn't know any better than to say something about it to me. And then I noticed. I suppose it makes some sense. You love someone derived from you more than the stranger in your bed. But I didn't love either of them more than I loved Wayne. I admired them. I longed for their freedom. Teresa's been in Berlin for five years, comes back every other Christmas. Has a Swiss boyfriend and a couple of cats. They both ran away as quickly as they could. I don't blame them. That life was nothing to stick around for.

A timer goes off.

CARMEN

Time for your pills.

Again? MARY

I'll get you some water. CARMEN

I can do it. MARY

No, let me. CARMEN

Carmen stands and exits to the kitchen.

Mary looks after her and then quickly stands up, exiting. The sound of the front door opening and closing.

Carmen returns with a water glass and a palm full of pills.

Mary? CARMEN

She sighs loudly.

Lord almighty, that woman. CARMEN

She exits, the sound of feet going up stairs.

Diana and Ishmael in her office. It's pretty empty other than the fake plant from Isaacson.

And? DIANA

ISHMAEL
I'm done. I don't want to go back. I don't want to be in pain anymore. All I do now is think about my foot. I assign a number to it and then I think about it. "Oh is it a 4? Is it a 6?" Who gives a shit? I want to think about something else. I want to do something else.

DIANA
Great. Like what?

School. I want to go to college.

ISHMAEL

That's fantastic.

DIANA

I guess.

ISHMAEL

No, really, it is. I'm so glad you thought about everything and decided on something.

DIANA

So now what?

ISHMAEL

So we think about what you should do next, medically speaking, so that you can focus your energy on something other than your pain.

DIANA

Yeah, so how do we do that?

ISHMAEL

There are a few options for someone in your situation. There's fusion, reconstruction, amputation.

DIANA

Amputation?

ISHMAEL

It seems extreme, but the medical technology's pretty impressive now. So it's a lot better than it used to be. Prosthetics have come a long way.

DIANA

Huh.

ISHMAEL

But I have a lot of literature that you can read about it and then you can make a decision once you've looked at all of it. I bet I could also find some guys here who could talk to you about their experiences with various surgeries and see if they can answer any questions that I can't.

She hands him a folder.

ISHMAEL

Yeah, ok.

DIANA

If your foremost concern is pain and given the number of infections you've already had in your foot, an amputation might end up being the least risky surgery.

ISHMAEL

How much would I lose?

DIANA

It would be a below knee amputation. But with rehab—and this is one of the best places in the world for that kind of rehab—you'd be walking pretty soon.

ISHMAEL

But I wouldn't have a foot.

DIANA

You'd have a prosthetic.

ISHMAEL

Right.

DIANA

And you may find it easier to walk on a prosthetic than it is to walk on your foot as it is. You may find you have increased mobility.

ISHMAEL

So that's what you think I should do?

DIANA

I think you should read everything, think about it and get back to me. Amputation is the scariest sounding, so I'm trying to make it sound more normalized. You would be able to prepare mentally somewhat if you were to opt for it.

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

You could even talk to your parents about it.

ISHMAEL

I could.

DIANA

Have you talked to them much this week?

ISHMAEL

Yeah, Sunday night we talked for awhile. They seem good. Thea was over for dinner, so I talked to her too.

DIANA

That's great.

ISHMAEL

She said she might come out to visit. They all might. Spring break is coming up.

DIANA

That would be nice. I'd love to meet them.

ISHMAEL

Sure. I told them about you. They think you sound nice.

DIANA

Oh—well.

ISHMAEL

I won't tell them you want to cut my leg off. They might not like you then.

DIANA

I don't *want* to cut your leg off. I think it might be a good option for you given the circumstances. But really, you should read everything, I'll find some guys for you to talk to and we'll reconvene. Ok?

ISHMAEL

Yeah. Ok.

A moment.

ISHMAEL

You think I could get into college?

DIANA

Absolutely. And I think you'd love it.

ISHMAEL

I wouldn't be too old?

DIANA

No. College is wasted on the young.

ISHMAEL

What does that mean?

DIANA
It means you'd be just fine.

ISHMAEL
Ok.

Ishmael stands up to leave. He takes the folder.

DIANA
You talk to a counselor yet?

ISHMAEL
Nah.

DIANA
You want me to make an appointment for you?

ISHMAEL
I think I'm good for now.

DIANA
Ok.

ISHMAEL
But thanks.

Diana's phone rings.

DIANA
You're welcome.

He exits.

Diana picks up the phone.

DIANA
Hey, what's—

She stands quickly, hitting her leg against the desk.

DIANA
Fuck. Yeah, I just—yeah, I'll be there as soon as possible.

She exits.

*Waiting room, Walter Reed, an hour or so later.
Carmen and General Kirkland are sitting.*

Diana enters. She sits next to her dad. He puts his arm around her.

DIANA

Do you want to see her?

GENERAL

Not yet.

DIANA

Ok. They're going to move her in a bit. They'll let us know when they do.

GENERAL

Move her where?

DIANA

I don't know.

A moment.

CARMEN

I went to get water and she was gone.

GENERAL

Please don't blame yourself.

CARMEN

She offered to get her own water. If she had gotten her own water?

GENERAL

It probably wouldn't have made a difference.

A moment.

CARMEN

She seemed better, didn't she?

GENERAL

I thought so.

CARMEN

So, why...?

Diana stares out.

DIANA

The stroke changed something. And we could see it, kind of, but so much of it was happening inside. The confusion. The frustration with being confused. The effusiveness. She told me she loved me more in the past two weeks than in my entire life. I—feel like I should have known. But I just wanted to believe that she was actually getting better.

GENERAL

Was she taking her medication?

CARMEN

I was giving it to her every day.

DIANA

We should have known. I should have known.

GENERAL

How could you?

DIANA

For over twenty years I've been prepared for this. Ever since that phone call sophomore year. I knew all the warning signs. When you called in February I knew I had to come back to help. Because I was ready for it. But, I guess I wasn't.

Diana rests her head on her father's shoulder.

DIANA

Did you call Teresa?

GENERAL

No. I— will you do it?

DIANA

Ok.

GENERAL

She'll want to come home for the service.

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

Maybe we'll finally meet the Swiss guy.

DIANA

Maybe. You think he'd come?

GENERAL

I don't know.

DIANA

Carmen you don't have to stay here while we wait. If you have things to do.

CARMEN

I was supposed to be working until 8.

DIANA

Oh—Dad, do you—I think it'd be fair if we continued to pay you until you find another place to work. And if you need help finding somewhere I'm sure there are people we can talk to.

CARMEN

Thank you.

DIANA

Do you need to go back to the house?

CARMEN

My car is there.

DIANA

Ok, here (*she finds her car keys and hands them to Carmen*) take my car back to the house.

CARMEN

Are you sure?

DIANA

Yeah, I don't know how long we'll be here.

CARMEN

Ok, thank you. I can come by tomorrow if you want.

GENERAL

That would be very nice. Thank you.

Carmen stands.

CARMEN

I'm so sorry.

DIANA

It's ok.

CARMEN

I'll see you tomorrow.

Carmen leaves.

GENERAL

Did you really know?

DIANA

What?

GENERAL

Did you know that Mom was going to do this?

DIANA

In the back of my mind, yes. I've always worried.

GENERAL

You should have said something.

DIANA

I made sure she was taking her medication. She seemed to be doing well. I didn't want to alarm you.

GENERAL

We could have transferred her to St. Elizabeth's. Or somewhere more permanent.

DIANA

We could have. But she hated hospitals.

GENERAL

Too many ghosts.

DIANA

Yes.

Diana looks at her phone.

DIANA

I don't have reception here. I'm going to find a place to call Teresa before it's too late there.

GENERAL

Ok.

DIANA

You need anything? Coffee?

GENERAL

That sounds good.

Before she gets up, Diana hugs General Kirkland. He continues to hold on.

GENERAL

I love you.

DIANA

I love you.

He lets go. Diana stands, she exits. General Kirkland puts his head in his hands.

Diana's bedroom. Morning.

DIANA

Can't sleep.
Haven't been able to sleep for two weeks.
I see Mom's face when I close my eyes.
The last time I saw her.
Smiling at me in the kitchen, having made a pot of coffee.
Coffee that's better than Dad's.
At the very least Mom understood the importance of moderation when it came to making coffee.
Now it's back to Dad's coffee.
Tar colored coffee.
Bitter coffee.
Angry coffee.
War coffee.
If he could just eat the coffee grounds he would
But I'm sure his dentist told him he can't.
Not with his old man teeth.
I called Terry yesterday.
I had to.
He offered to come out to DC for the service.
Nice of him.
Not sure what I want from him,
But nice of him.

A long silence.

I hate this.
I wish.

A knock on the door.

Diana? GENERAL

Yeah? DIANA

I saw your light on. GENERAL

Come in. DIANA

He pokes his head in.

My room's too dark. GENERAL

Yeah. DIANA

I can't sleep in there. Can I...? GENERAL

Sure. DIANA

General gets into bed next to Diana.

What are you writing? GENERAL

Just thinking, really. DIANA

Ok, I won't disturb you. GENERAL

I have to head to the hospital in a few. Early amputation scheduled. DIANA

I don't know how you do it. GENERAL

Me neither. DIANA

GENERAL

Good kid?

DIANA

The best. Smart kid. I gave him all the research on his injury and he's opting for an amputation. Going to apply to colleges. Wants to study film.

GENERAL

Huh. Because of you?

DIANA

A little. I asked him to think about what he wanted to do with his life. And he did.

GENERAL

And how's Isaacson dealing with that?

DIANA

He's too busy sniping with the Chief of Orthopedics at Bethesda to care right now. Works out for me. And Ishmael.

GENERAL

Ishmael?

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

Well, break a leg. (*a moment*) Literally.

DIANA

Dad...

GENERAL

I can't help it.

Diana gets up.

DIANA

Your affairs? Do you feel bad about them?

GENERAL

What?

DIANA

Do you worry that this all happened because Mom found out about your affairs?

GENERAL

I—

DIANA

She and I talked about it when Terry and I got married. She warned me about Terry. About men like Terry. And men like you. I didn't want to believe it. I didn't believe it. And it was such terrible timing, which was totally her way. She would tell me a devastating story the day I was getting married. Making it about her. About the two of you. I think it poisoned her. And then she poisoned me and Terry. She couldn't keep it to herself anymore. She could live with—

GENERAL

Your mother was sick. She was sick for years.

DIANA

But does that excuse it?

A long moment.

GENERAL

It doesn't.

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

I didn't know that she had told you.

DIANA

Yeah.

GENERAL

I'm sorry.

Diana puts her hand on his shoulder.

DIANA

I'm going to shower. You want the light on or off.

GENERAL

On is fine.

DIANA

Ok.

Diana exits.

A recovery room at Walter Reed. After Ishmael's surgery. Diana enters.

DIANA

Ishmael, hey. How's it going?

ISHMAEL

Alright.

DIANA

The surgery went fine. Looks like your foot was pretty infected, most likely would have had to amputate it somewhere down the line anyway.

ISHMAEL

Oh, that's great.

DIANA

Saved you some pain, at least.

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

DIANA

I met your parents outside. They seemed really sweet.

ISHMAEL

Yeah, they wanted to be here. My mom's been crying a lot.

DIANA

I'm sure they'll take good care of you.

ISHMAEL

They want me to do rehab back in Chicago. I told them I'd have to think about it.

DIANA

I'm sure we could find a good rehab facility for you out there.

ISHMAEL

Not as good as the Fishbowl.

DIANA

Well, in a couple months the Fishbowl won't even be there. You'll have to move over to Bethesda anyway.

ISHMAEL

Oh yeah.

DIANA

But I'm sure there's an equivalent and I'm sure it's top-notch.

ISHMAEL

You gonna move over there too?

DIANA

I don't know. I hope so.

ISHMAEL

If you need me to put in a good word, I know it doesn't count for much, but I will.

DIANA

Thanks, it does count. Everything counts.

ISHMAEL

I guess it does.

DIANA

I'm going to let you rest. The nurse on call can get you whatever you need.

ISHMAEL

Cool, thanks.

DIANA

See you soon.

ISHMAEL

Yeah.

Diana exits. We see her outside the room. She takes a deep breath. She breaks down. Isaacson walks by.

ISAACSON

Diana.

DIANA

I'm ok.

ISAACSON

You should be home.

DIANA

Specialist Blanco's surgery was scheduled for this morning. It was important for me to be there.

ISAACSON

How did it go?

DIANA

Great. No complications and looks like he would have needed an amputation down the line anyway.

ISAACSON

Good.

He looks at her for a moment.

ISAACSON

It took awhile but the board finally read your proposal.

DIANA

And?

ISAACSON

Unanimously rejected.

DIANA

Oh.

ISAACSON

I got official word last week, but with your mother's service and everything I thought it could wait.

DIANA

Thanks.

ISAACSON

Your contract runs out in August. But given the circumstances, I'm sure we could find a way to amend that. Pull some strings with Deerborn. You could be back in California by June if you wanted.

DIANA

Would—would you prefer that?

ISAACSON

I think you're a damn good surgeon. I'd bring you to Bethesda if you wanted. But I don't know why you would want to. Not when you can live on the beach and golf in Venice.

Diana looks at him.

I'll do it. DIANA

You will? ISAACSON

Yeah. DIANA

You don't have to be a martyr. ISAACSON

I'm not. DIANA

Fair enough. ISAACSON

He shakes her hand.

I'll make a recommendation to the board to draw up a new contract for the fall. ISAACSON

Great. DIANA

In the meantime, may I suggest that you raid the pharmacy and get yourself some sleeping pills? ISAACSON

That seems highly unethical. DIANA

Then get yourself a prescription and sleep for a week. Doctor's orders. ISAACSON

Isn't the whole point that doctors shouldn't give orders? DIANA

Diana. Just get some rest, ok? ISAACSON

Ok. I can do that. DIANA

Did you get the flowers my wife sent? ISAACSON

We did. Thank you.

DIANA

Good. Go home.

ISAACSON

Yes, sir.

DIANA

She salutes. He smiles. He exits. She looks out at the audience and up, closes her eyes.

End of play.